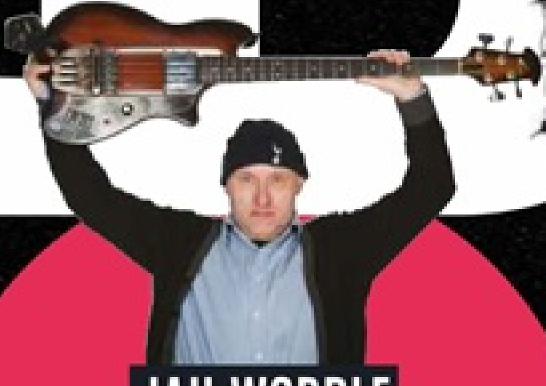
REVIEWED SANDBERG, FENDER, ANACONDA, STONEFIELD, SONIC FARM AND ASHDOWN ON TEST PAGE 52!

THE UK'S NUMBER ONE BASS GUITAR MAGAZINE

Bass Guitar Magazine



JAH WOBBLE JOINS THE LONDON BASS GUITAR SHOW 2018

JEAN-JACQUES BURNEL
THE LEGEND SPEAKS

THE STRANGLERS

"Good bass playing is in your hands — and I hit hard!"

SUZI QUATRO
"GO OUT THERE AND KILL IT EVERY TIME!"

INTERVIEWS

- ASHDOWN 20TH ANNIVERSARY
- ANDERS ODDEN Satyricon
- GED GRIMES Simple Minds
- CHRIS CHILDS Thunder
- FIELDY Korn

EXPERT TUITION

- Better Plectrum Technique
- Cuban Rhythms Explored
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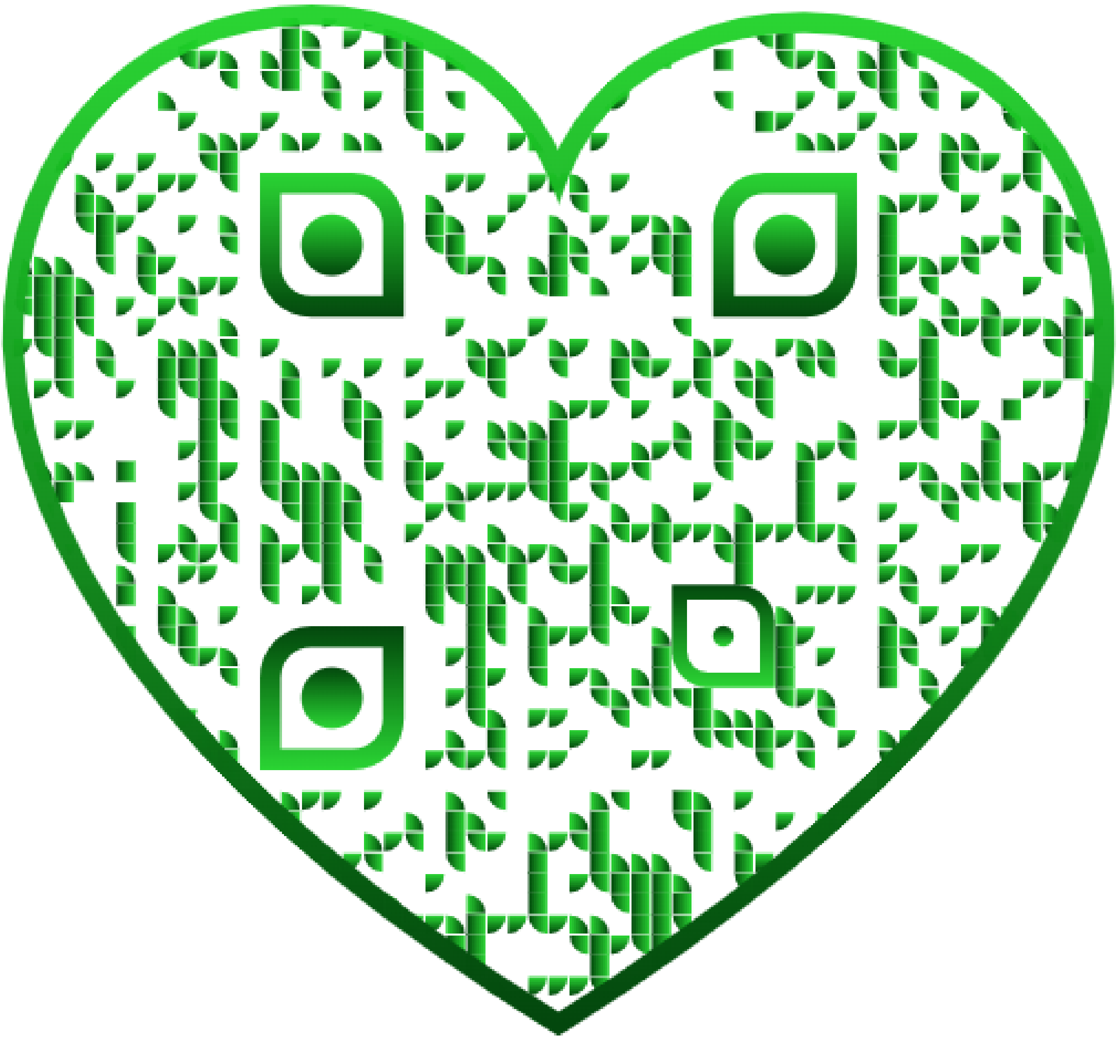

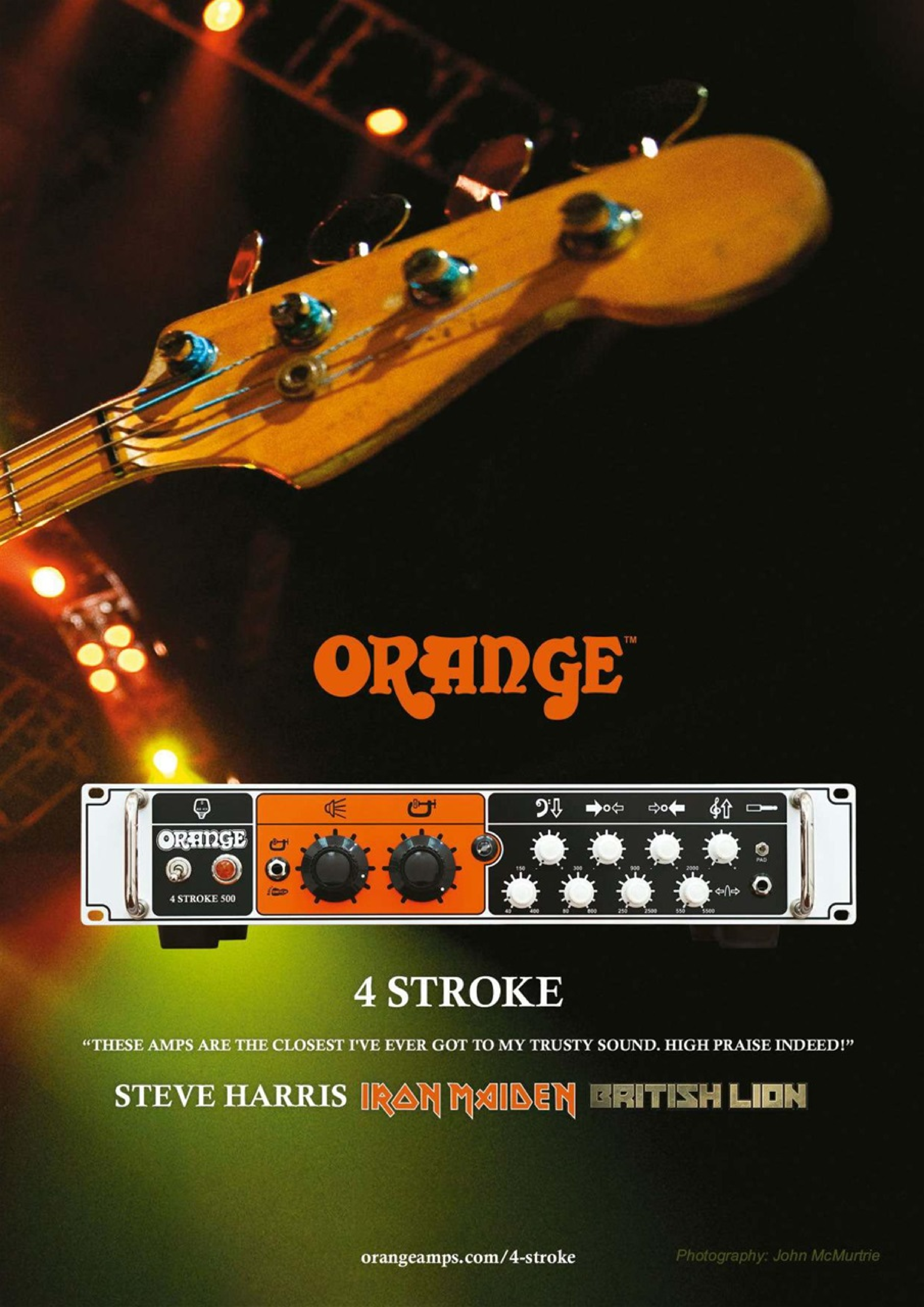
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IRON MAIDEN
BRITISH LION
orangeamps.com/4-stroke
Photography: John McMurtrie

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Happy New Year, friends! I'm delighted that you've joined us here at this country's only bass-devoted print magazine for another year of excitement at the low end. Last year was crazy enough, as you'll know if you read our end-of-2017 gear roundup in December, and we're hoping that we in the bass community and our colleagues in the gear manufacture business are in for even more fun over the 12 months.

We kick off this issue with the mighty Jean-Jacques Burnel of the Stranglers, a man who has been spearheading the bass cause since way back in 1974. Compromise and accepting defeat have never been in JJ's agenda, whether in music or in bass territory, and it's always a huge honour to nip down the motorway to the Stranglers' country retreat and catch up with what he's up to. Suzi Quatro, Korn bassist Reggie 'Fieldy' Arvizu, Mark Gooday of Ashdown Engineering and Chris Childs of Thunder join JJ for a magazine that we're truly proud of.

In the six years since I became the editor of this hallowed magazine, and indeed in the decade before that, the *BGM* ethos has always been to bring you, the reader, the tools and information you need to become the best bass player you can be. That was, is and always will be our stated aim, so dig into this issue for reviews of bass gear from the affordable to the costly. Our tutors Steve Lawson, Stuart Clayton and Phil Mann – the Trio Of Doom to the rest of us – are here to give you the theory and techniques you'll need to take the next step, no matter what your ability level. It's a privilege to work with talents as prodigious as these.

Let me sign off with an invitation to come and say hello at the London Bass Guitar Show on 3 and 4 March at Olympia in Kensington. I'll be the guy struggling futilely to keep the guest bassists in line – and it'll be great to take a break to hear your suggestions about the content of *BGM*. Enjoy this issue and see you there!

Joel McIver, editor

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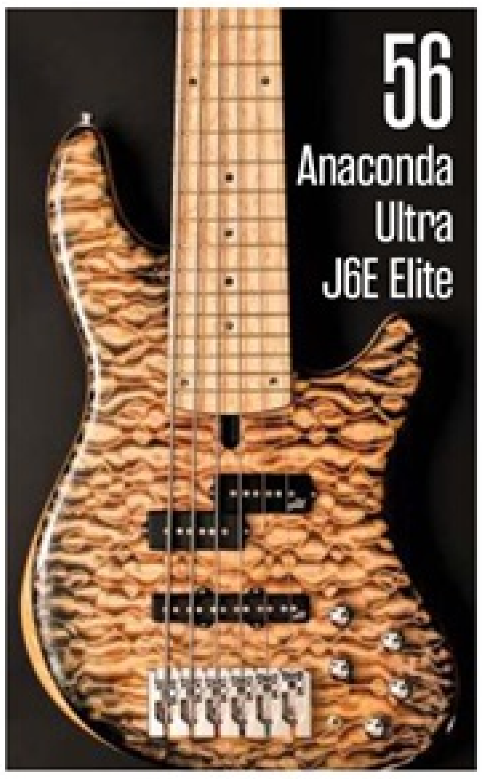
Sandberg Chris Childs Signature Enigma



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Anaconda Ultra J6E Elite

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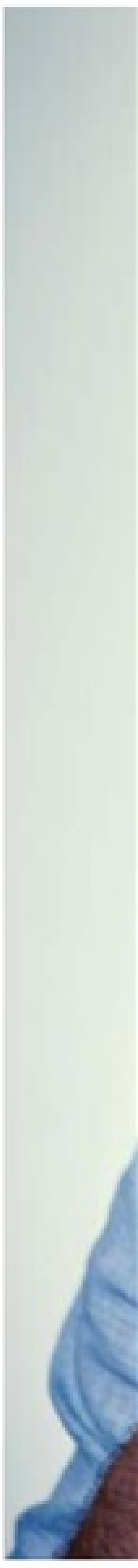

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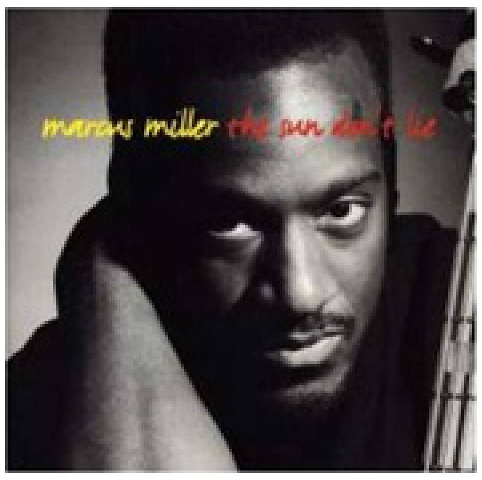

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THE LOW DOWN

News and views from the bass world, collated by *BGM*'s team of intrepid newshounds

© Tina K

NEW 2

Fender have recently announced a pair of new limited edition basses for Adam Clayton. The U2 bassist's new models are classic Precision and Jazz models, notable for their splendid purple sparkle finish and matching headstock. They also come with custom shop pickups, abalone block inlays, and a carbon-reinforced maple neck. Bag either for a price not unadjacent to two grand, assuming you're searching for a new bass and still haven't found what you're looking for.

www.fender.com

LONDON BASS GUITAR SHOW IS GO!

We're delighted to announce the appearance of a stellar group of bassists at the forthcoming London Bass Guitar Show, to be held on 3 and 4 March at London's Olympia. Deep breath...

- The mighty Jah Wobble, renowned since his days with Public Image Limited and a prolific solo artist
- Session veteran, author and raconteur Mo Foster, who has played with more huge bands than we've snapped strings
- Thunder bassist Chris Childs, backed by Harry James, legendary drummer with Thunder, Magnum and Snakecharmer
- The great Steve Lawson, solo artist extraordinaire, educator and *BGM* tutor
- Juan 'Snow Owl' Garcia-Herreros, the Columbia-born, New York-raised, Vienna-resident bass virtuoso and solo artist who has accompanied Sir Elton John among others.

These fantastic musicians join our already-announced Saturday headliner Guy Pratt at the LBGS 2018, making it the bass event of the year. Keep an eye on our social media for the last couple of announcements – and we promise a bass event like no other, especially as a huge range of exhibitors and educators will be there to talk bass with you.
See you there!

www.londonbassguitarshow.com, www.facebook.com/londonbassguitarshow, @bassguitarshow

DEAR JOHN

The *Derby Telegraph* recently reported that a campaign had been launched for a plaque celebrating the life of the late Asia bassist John Wetton to be included in the Midlands city's Made In Derby project. "The scheme will see an initial eight plaques, made of cast metal and stone, set into paving in Albion Street and Exchange Streets," the paper wrote. "Each will have a feature allowing smart-phone users to learn more about the individuals and their achievements. More commemorations could be added in future years." We await the results with interest.

http://bit.ly/2BB68qn

SHOP TALK

Our monthly catchup with the great and good of bass-making

When we met Italian luthier Miguel di Carlo, our first question was, why the Spanish-sounding name? "It's not my real name – I'm Michele di Carlantonio," he laughed. "Miguel di Carlo is my nickname on an online discussion forum for bassists. I'm known by that name, so I adopted it for the company. It also has the advantage of being short enough to fit on our headstocks!"

He adds: "Miguel di Carlo is a completely Italian project. It all started when my friend Salvo Lupo and I had an idea: we wanted to create the ultimate, perfect bass guitar."

That's a tall order, we observe, but as he says: "We know that every bassist is always trying to attain the nirvana of bass perfection, and looking for the perfect instrument. Of course the perfect bass doesn't exist, but that didn't stop us from trying to create one, and we believe we've got pretty close to it!"

Sounds promising. "Our bass guitars are handcrafted in Sicily; we use the best hardware, pickups and electronics, all of them made in Italy too. We import highly selected woods from all over the world, all CITES certified, of course. We deliberately look for alternatives to the usual ash or alder, and choose less traditional woods: ebony from Gabon for some fingerboards, black korina for some bodies... They have to be high-quality tonewoods as well as looking good."

Miguel says that the shape of his basses is reminiscent of the Jazz bass, and I would agree, but I'd also describe it as pleasantly halfway between a Precision and a Jazz. The headstock has the four-a-side style, and carries a stylised image of a double bass as well as Miguel's name.

"Our second company logo turns the Fibonacci Sequence into a bass clef: to us, that's the image of bass perfection," he tells us. "It was created by my wife, who is a graphic designer. Everything about us is handcrafted and proudly made in Italy! We have started a joint venture with Galli Strings, who have been active for over 50 years, and amp maker GRBass who, like us, are a new Italian startup. We decided to get together to bring forward the concept, the ideal, of pure, absolute 'Made in Italy' and offer it to the market. Our bass guitars have Galli strings installed, and when customers try our instruments, they are plugged into GR amps, and vice versa."

The company aims for the global market. "Italy is our starting point, and our home base, but we are reaching out to Europe and also to North and South America. We don't intend to take on the mass-producing giants: instead, we want to be appreciated as all-Italian luthiers and craftsmen." Move over pizza and pasta – we now have Italian bass!

Silvia Bluejay

STARTING UP

Two great British bassists returned to the public eye recently. First up was Bruce Thomas, who played bass as part of Elvis Costello's backing band the Attractions for many years, returning with a new album, *Back To The Start*. Recorded with singer-songwriter Spencer Brown, the album contains new original material and a cover of the Beatles' 'There's A Place'.

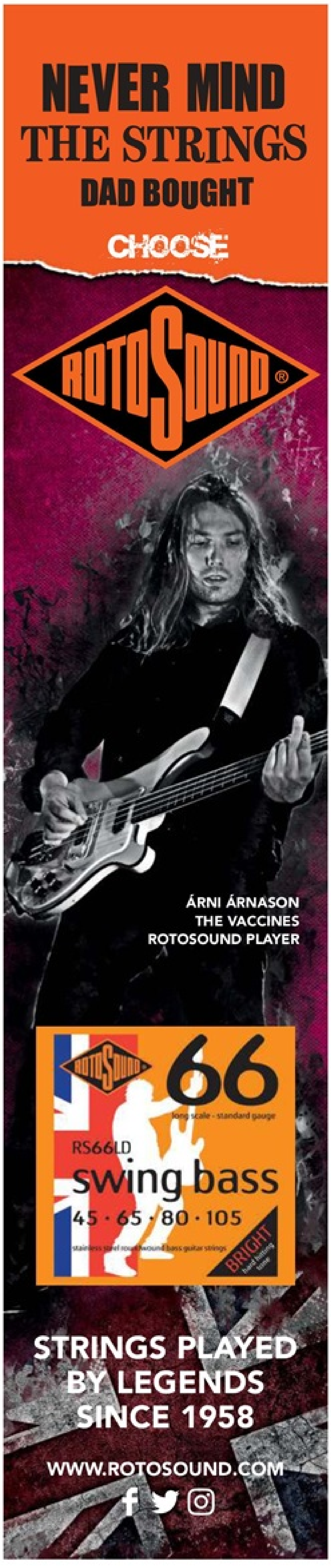
We were also delighted to see a comeback from XTC bassist Colin Moulding, whose new EP *Great Expectations* was recorded with his former bandmate Terry Chambers. The duo, going under the name TC&I, will be interviewed in a forthcoming issue of *BGM*.

www.brucethomas.co.uk, https://burningshed.com

ART BEAT

The prolific German photographer Ingrid Hertfelder, snapper of many bassists from Marcus Miller to Richard Bona and beyond, has launched an online gallery at http://bit.ly/2AB7Hrs. If we had our way, all bassists would wear a silver suit like Marcus'...

www.ingridhertfelder.com



BASSWATCH

Every month, keen bass-spotter Ray Walker brings us an online bargain

Carvin Icon IC5
£1315 https://tinyurl.com/y8t9fbxv

Up this month is a wonderful Carvin Icon IC5 five-string bass. This little looker is made up of an alder body with a beautiful spalted maple top. The 34" scale neck is maple, also with a birdseye maple fingerboard, and we have a Hipshot A-style bridge with Carvin Premium tuners. The bass is loaded with Carvin SP2 soapbar active pickups which have, apparently, been repositioned to a tone-enhancing 'sweet spot'. Weighing in at 3.6kg, this is a posture-friendly bass with premium features that won't break your bank roll. Beware, this bass is quite the conversation starter. The price is on the high side but you don't see many of these online – go on, treat yourself...

GIG READY

FOR £500

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BASS Dean Edge 09, £170

FX Boss CEB-3 Bass Chorus, £90

AMP Ashdown AAA-60-10T, £240

FOR £1000

READY TO ROLL FOR £1K!

BASS Ibanez SR-400 QM-BBT, £320

AMP Warwick BC150 1x15, £370

FX Markbass Super Synth, £310

A BUG'S LIFE

There is no easy way to spin this story. Geddy Lee of Rush has recently had a gut-dwelling microbe of the species *pseudotrichonympha* (try saying that after a bottle of claret) named after him. You're unlikely to be carrying *P. leei* around in your innards, as far as we know, because the critter apparently prefers the insides of termites. Scientists at the University of British Columbia in Canada also honoured Geddy's bandmates Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart with eponymous microbes.

The author of the paper describing the new species, Patrick Keeling, said: "A Spanish postdoc, Javier del Campo, asked me to recommend some good Canadian music, and I suggested he listen to Rush. He came back to me and said 'Those microbes we're finding have long hair like the guys on the album *2112*!'" There's been no word yet on whether *P. leei* prefers a Rickenbacker 4001 or a Fender Jazz.

Pic Tina K

HANDY MURRAY

Neil Murray is a legend in bass world; a veteran of more bands than we've had backstage beers, and a bloke who thinks nothing of playing 2000 performances of a world-famous West End musical in a row. The acclaimed American amp builders Aguilar have recently added Murray to their UK artist roster, with our man playing through an Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 head, available on this side of the pond via Barnes & Mullins.

A full run-through of Murray's career could take up this entire magazine (we've tried) but a brief summary includes the names Whitesnake, Black Sabbath, Gary Moore, Brian May and the aforementioned stint at Queen's *We Will Rock You* musical. He also teaches at ACM in Guildford and is currently playing in Snakecharmer alongside drummer Harry James, also of Thunder and Magnum (and soon to be accompanying Chris Childs at this year's LBGS).

Says the great man: "Over the years, I've installed Aguilar preamps in some of my basses, and been very happy with the sound, and now I'm even happier that an Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 amp is part of my setup. Nothing flashy – just tone!"

www.aguilaramp.com, www.bandm.co.uk

Pic Digital Mechanic

THE MU

Work Not Play is the MU's campaign to end the practice of asking musicians to work for little or no fee

It's a fact of being a musician that people will ask you to work for free all the time. We've heard all the reasons why – it's for charity; it's good exposure; it's a trial run; it's my brother's sister's best friend's aunt's birthday... As a trade union, we're not going to stop you playing for free if it is truly worth it – SXSW, your parents' 60th wedding anniversary, Glastonbury. But if the gig is your friend's company's work do, for example, you can and should ask for a fee that you think is fair.

We understand that sometimes it can be difficult to explain the issue and what working for free really means – especially to people who aren't musicians or self-employed workers, and especially when you're just starting out or part-time. We also understand that identifying, understanding and communicating the value of your work can be tricky. We know from plenty of experience that negotiating can be tough. That is where we come in – to support you through the process.

There is no one solution to a problem like this. But there are plenty of ways to counter and challenge the expectation of unpaid work. The Musicians' Union launched Work Not Play to raise awareness of the issue, and empower our members to say no to offers of unpaid work and negotiate a fair fee.

Have you been asked to work for free recently? Tell us about it. Email the details to worknotplay@**theMU.org** or tweet using the hashtag **#WorkNotPlayMU**. We can look into it anonymously, find out why there's no money for musicians, and see if we can get a better deal. If they do not move to a more musician-friendly position, we can name and shame them for not playing fair.

If you want to go it alone, asking for a fee works surprisingly often. If you need support at any point, get in touch with your MU Regional Office. One way to start a discussion about fair pay is to use the MU's recommended minimum rates. These are the minimum we think you should be paid for your work – performing live, teaching, in theatre, sessions or as a freelance orchestral player. You can find them via **theMU.org**.

Think of MU rates as a guide to your value, an aid to your negotiations, and a basic calculation of how much you need to cover your costs as a musician. Consider it a living wage that includes things most people don't pay for, such as instruments, equipment and insurance, or things most people don't have to work out for themselves, such as national insurance.

Another way to counter this unfair expectation is to be able to communicate your value effectively. One way you can do that is through PR. Building a good reputation, illustrating your professionalism, and developing a strong relationship with your fanbase will stand you in good stead for everything from getting press to getting paid.

In person, communicating your value requires assertiveness; the ability to state your views directly, honestly and with confidence. For some people, this skill comes naturally. For others, it's a real struggle and can be perceived as confrontation, when the goal is merely effective communication. This is an important skill in negotiating, and something we'll explore in more detail in a future column.

The best way to make sure you get a fair deal is to join a trade union. Trade union members are paid more, on average, than non-union members. In the MU's case, union membership gives you access to advice on fair pay, negotiating a fee, contracts and other important issues which you face as a musician. When you're an MU member, more than 30,000 musicians have got your back.

Contact your MU Regional Office for advice on fair pay, what to do if you are asked to work for little or no fee, or advice on any other aspect of your career via **theMU.org/contact.**

BASSICALLY SPEAKING

Bassists reveal the tricks of their trade faster than a snapping D string

© Sarah Waxberg

GEAR
BASSES LTD B-205SM, LTD B-204SM
EFFECTS Pitchfork pitchshifter
AMPS Sansamp RBI, Crown XLS1500 power amp, Ampeg 8x10 cab

DEE CRONKITE CURRENTS

Sometimes a bass part requires more technicality to match the guitars, but in other instances when properly executed, I believe less can do more. I plan on implementing slap in future material to add more variety. I am currently endorsed by ESP/LTD, D'Addario Strings, Planet Waves Cables, In-Tune Guitar Picks, and Ernie Ball. The company Bawls also sends our band cases of their great energy drinks to help us stay energised for our performances and throughout our long night drives between shows. I play a five-string bass, because I believe they handle lower tunings better, and having an extra string helps with the technical parts. The secret of playing bass well is backtracking bass live. Just kidding… don't do that. Instead, practise! My first bass was an LTD B-155DX. It's a see-through blue five-string with passive pickups and active EQ. I am currently using it as my backup on tour. I am completely impressed with ESP/LTD's quality. Eventually I want to try out the Ernie Ball Bongo… mainly because it looks cool. Before playing bass I used to play guitar a lot and my favourite brand was PRS. Eventually I will get my hands on a PRS bass. When I think of great bass players I think of Paul McCartney and Flea. Both managed to become household names and extremely influential for many genres. I admire Flea's slap style as well. If Keanu Reeves was as good of a bass player as he was an actor in the *John Wick* franchise… he'd be a pretty good bassist.

www.currentsofficial.com

GEAR
BASSES Music Man Bongo 5
EFFECTS Fractal Audio Systems Axe-Fx II XL
AMPS As above

DANIEL OLIVER NOTHING MORE

I endorse Music Man instruments, Ernie Ball strings, David Eden amplifiers and cabs, Fractal Audio and Orion straps. I consider myself pretty familiar with the neck of the bass and I love playing high up the register, but every time I pick up a six-string I get totally lost. I also find the tone of the sixth string to always be pretty disappointing. Ideally I would like to play four-string basses all the time, but I really need that low B for a lot of the Nothing More tunes. Slapping just isn't my thing. I've spent a decent amount of time learning the techniques and practising, but I just can't get totally into it. It's like unicycling, for me. I can do it but it's never comfortable or smooth. I was on tour once and a super drunk crew member for another band saw my unicycle in the trailer and began telling me how he was from a family of circus performers; then, drunk, he got on the unicycle and started jumping down stairs while doing 360s and juggling beer bottles that he would take from people as he rode by. Handing that guy my unicycle was exactly how I feel when I let a slapping guru play my bass. The secret of playing bass well is listening to and understanding the other musicians you're playing with and figuring what you have to do to glue them together. Sometimes you just need to lay low and be there for them. Other times you get to be the superstar getting carried out of the stadium on their shoulders. The best bass players get to do both. My favourite bass is the first Music Man Bongo I ever got. At that time I was teaching myself to weld and putting together this wild contraption called the 'Bassonator' that would violently spin the bass around in the air and allow the rest of the band to basically play it like a piano/hammer dulcimer. Just look it up on YouTube. In the creation, testing and performing of the 'Bassonator' that Bongo got pretty gnarled and has aptly been named War Beast by the guys at Music Man. I have three Bongos now and none of them sound like War Beast. I have easily done over a thousand shows on that bass and I guess all the sweat and general abuse has really opened up the tone of the wood. Playing the bass is a practice in the study of connectivity between energies. We give kick drums a tonal value, and give identity to messy chords. We can play one note and be heard and felt a mile away. The bass is so powerful yet so simple. We know that it just takes one simple idea to unite the world forever, and we spend our lives in pursuit of that. Our new record *The Stories We Tell Ourselves* is out now and we're touring to accompany it. Due to the complexity of the bass tones on this album, I've had to spend a lot of time in the rehearsal room with our drummer Ben Anderson combing through every part of each song to recreate what's on record. I'm really stoked about it! I'm also back in the workshop, refining my latest invention, 'Scorpion Tail'. I used to think that the bass solo was huge and dangerous, but now I've totally outdone myself.

www.nothingmore.net

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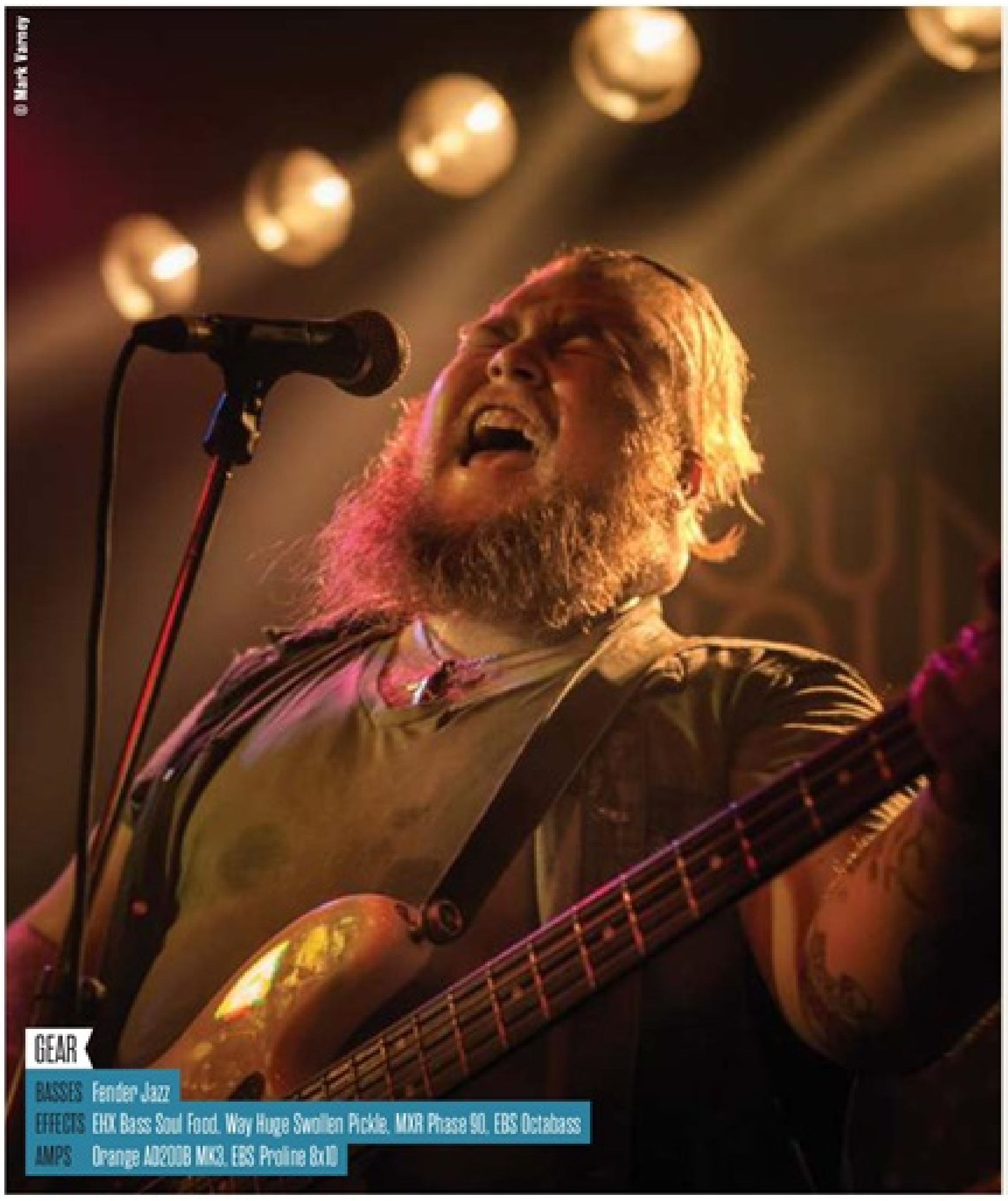
TYLA CAMPBELL
PHIL CAMPBELL & THE BASTARD SONS

I would describe my bass style as aggressive! A lot of the songs we play live are fast-paced, so I have to make sure I keep up with our drummer. One of the songs from our upcoming album had a working title of 'Fast Bastard' – I tried to keep the title but I lost that battle. I am a proud endorsee of Orange Amplifiers, Dunlop Strings, MXR Pedals and Fender. The secret of playing bass well is to not overplay the song. Have a good understanding with the drummer and play for the song, not for you. Playing in tune usually helps. Practice your power stance, too! My favourite bass ever to date is Lemmy's Rickenbacker. I've never had the chance to play it but his bass look and sound was so iconic. My bass heroes? Obviously Lemmy, goes without saying. I've always admired Pino Palladino: obviously being Welsh and getting to where he is now, he's someone to look up to. I'm a big fan of Sting's new album, too, he has such a unique style… nobody plays like him. The greatest bass player that ever lived was Jaco Pastorius. My brother Dane used to be into his bass playing back in the day, when we used to have mix tapes for the car. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. If I could get the bass tone of any album ever released, I would choose Queens Of The Stone Age's *Songs For The Deaf*. It's such a great rock album and Nick Oliveri definitely put his stamp on that record. Our debut album *The Age Of Absurdity* is out now.

www.philcampbell.net

GEAR
BASSES Fender American Professional Precision, Fender Jazz
EFFECTS MXR M80 Bass Distortion and Bass DI
AMPS Orange 4 Stroke 500 head, Orange OBI 300 head, Orange OBC 8x10 cab



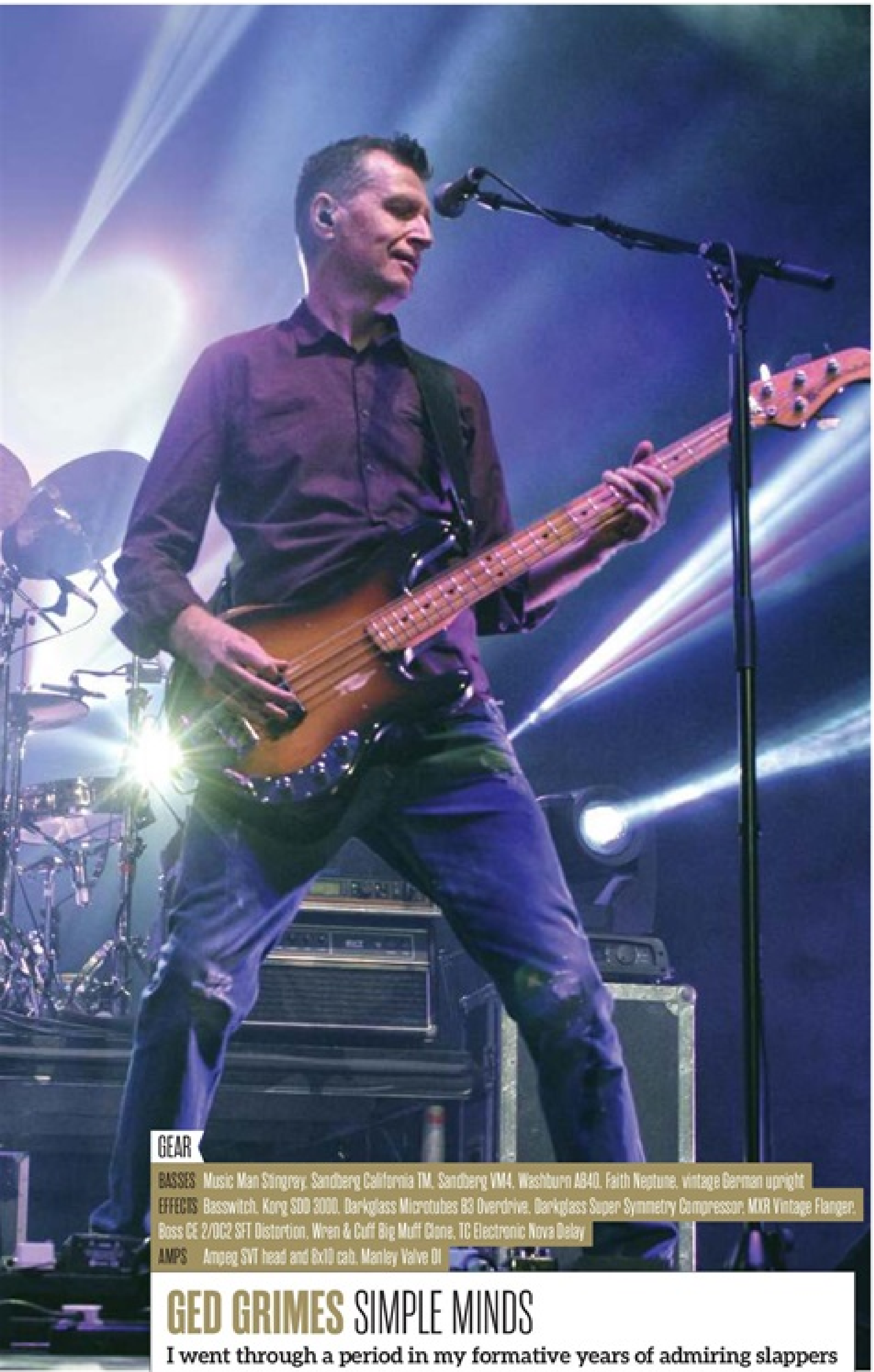
© Mark Varney

GEAR
BASSES Fender Jazz
EFFECTS EHX Bass Soul Food, Way Huge Swollen Pickle, MXR Phase 90, EBS Octabass
AMPS Orange AD200B MK3, EBS Proline 8x10

DALE TONKS THE BAD FLOWERS

I would like to think my bass style is my own. A heavy fuzzy groove is the way it's been described – a mix of Northern Soul, classic rock and the prog stuff I grew up listening to. It's been sculpted a lot from being in a power trio too, learning how to fill out the sound with chords and making my bass sound a little thinner and guitary by rolling off the neck pickup and fuzzing it up. I love the guys who can do slap well, and who started it all, like Louis Johnson. I could watch that guy play for hours. It's something that I need to master to be a well-rounded bass player. My first bass was a Peavey Milestone III; I would look at it all the time, walking past the shop in town, and think 'Man, I'd love to be able to play that really loudly at home to annoy the neighbours'. I saved for weeks and weeks and got it in the end, and I've never looked back since. We have also have lots of neighbours. My favourite bass has got to be my Fender Jazz, aka Jazzy Fontain! It's been through it all over the last few years on the road, and has scars and chunks missing to prove it. It's a MIM, but one of the nicest I've ever played, with a fast-flowing neck and such a full tone and presence. That may be because I swapped out the pickups for Seymour Duncan Quarter Pounders, but either way it's got it all. Without a doubt, the greatest bassist ever is Geezer Butler of Black Sabbath. For me, the guy is a pure icon and genius. The first thing I was given to learn by my dad was the *Paranoid* album; I sat down and listened, and I was just blown away. I had never heard bass playing like it. Our debut album *Starting Gun* is out in February; we will be out on tour with Stone Broken and Jarred James Nichols at the end of February and March all over the UK.

www.thebadflowers.uk



GEAR

BASSES Music Man Stingray, Sandberg California TM, Sandberg VM4, Washburn AB40, Faith Neptune, vintage German upright

EFFECTS Basswitch, Korg SDD 3000, Darkglass Microtubes B3 Overdrive, Darkglass Super Symmetry Compressor, MXR Vintage Flanger, Boss CE 2/OC2 SFT Distortion, Wren & Cuff Big Muff Clone, TC Electronic Nova Delay

AMPS Ampeg SVT head and 8x10 cab, Manley Valve DI

GED GRIMES SIMPLE MINDS

I went through a period in my formative years of admiring slappers such as Larry Graham, Marcus Miller, Louis Johnson and so on, and when the need arises I wouldn't hesitate to slap… but you have to know when it's necessary, which is not as often as you think! I don't play five- or six-string bass, because Moog bass pedals go lower and look better. For endorsements, Sandberg were very proactive when I started using their bass guitars a few years back, and the quality of their bass builds is great. TC Electronic in Denmark have also been great with their fab range of pedals. Being a drum programmer really helps you understand the relationship between bass and drums, so I would encourage young guys to get into that – it really helps you understand the role of the rhythm section. My first bass was a Guild B301 – mahogany, heavy but a nice guitar. My favourite bass ever to date is my 1977 Musicman Stingray, coupled with a 1970s Ampeg SVT, but I'm still searching for the ultimate vintage Fender Precision. My bass heroes are Bernard Edwards, the ultimate groove merchant and the reason I bought my first Music Man; Simon Raymonde, whose contribution to the Cocteau Twins' sound is underrated; I loved his melodic/chord style of playing, and Tony Levin. I've loved everything Tony has done, from King Crimson through to his work with Peter Gabriel. A brilliant combo of melody and groove. And Derek Forbes; Derek was formerly a guitarist, and his inventiveness was an integral part of those early Simple Minds records. Great tone and bass-lines. Simple Minds are about to release our new album, *Walk Between Worlds*, and we will tour Europe in February 2018 and beyond in the summer.

www.simpleminds.com

GEAR
BASSES Fender Precision, Gibson Ripper copy
EFFECTS Lovetone Big Cheese
AMPS Ampeg SVT 7 Pro, Orange 4x10 and 1x15 cabs

DAVID VACHON
BLACK MOTH

My bass style is heavy, full-on, pounding, overdriven, picked bass. I have always played four-string basses, and never had the need to go to five or six. We used to play some A# stuff but that was on one of my spare basses. Keeping stuff in those low tunings is a nightmare for our tech and it just causes more hassle than it's worth. The secret of playing bass well is to practise with your drummer and lock in together. A tight rhythm section is key. Control your playing in a way to have consistency and not to 'whack' those strings. Engineers hate popping strings on pickups. My first bass was some cheap thing a friend gave me when I was a kid. I never changed the strings on it so my fingers ended up being destroyed, and the action was so high it sounded terrible. The next proper bass I got was a Fender 51 P-Bass which I loved until it was stolen, along with two other basses of mine. My go-to bass for live and studio is a good old Fender P with a hot pickup. For some reason it's perfect, and if I get a custom bass I will get them to copy it. The greatest bass player that ever lived? This is a tough one. Lemmy has to be up there; he provided a rumble and energy to bass playing that carved a way for one of the greatest and loudest bands ever. We're just about to release our third album, *Anatomical Venus.*

www.blackmothofficial.com

CHLOE LITTLE INHEAVEN

My bass style is no-frills punk. I listen to a lot of different styles of music, but my favourite era is 1977 and the punk movement – it feels like one of the last big musical revolutions and I take a lot of my attitude and DIY spirit from that. I do not play five- or six-string bass, because I'm not an egomaniac. Hey, it works for some people (I don't know who these people are), but for our band it's absolutely the wrong sound, look and style. I do not slap, because I'm not Flea. Basically again, it's just not our sound. Did Paul Simonon slap? No. There is 100 percent a place for it; look at Robert Trujillo or Doug Wimbish who completely own it. But in our band it has to be all downpicking, so you really hear the urgency in our songwriting. The secret of playing bass well is listening to lots of records and practising in the mirror. I think knowing what music you like is really key to nailing your instrument; I now know exactly what tones I like from certain records and musical movements. I try and replicate them all at once while also bringing my own unique style to it. I also believe in the 10,000 hours technique… if you do anything for this long you can become an expert. Keep going, kids! My first bass was a black Epiphone Ripper. I acquired this when I was a guitarist in another band, and our bass player left to play drums in the huge pop band Rudimental (hello, Beanie!). Instead of going through the trauma of finding another bass player I made the decision that I would put down the Danelectro and start playing bass. He was kind and let me keep the Ripper while he toured the world, and I ended up keeping it for about three years! It's now been returned to its rightful owner. My bass heroes are Tina Weymouth, Kim Gordon, Dee Dee Ramone and Este Haim. The greatest bass player that ever lived is Paz Lenchantin. She is an incredible all-rounder and has been the glue in many bands. She is a bass chameleon and one of the best performers I have ever seen on stage – you can't take your eyes off her. I'm very proud that our debut album came out in September 2017 and we will be touring the UK and Europe to celebrate it. It's the best musical debut since 1977.

www.facebook.com/inheavenband

GEAR
BASSES Fender American Vintage Precision, Fender Mustang
EFFECTS Earthquaker Devices Hoof Fuzz V2, TC Electronic Spectracomp Compressor
AMPS Ampeg PF800, Ampeg PF210

PROMENADE MUSIC

01524 410 202
www.promenademusic.co.uk

4 String Basses

13994 - Bass Collection Portrait Fretless Bass
15510 - Bass Collection Rhythm Stick, Sunburst
10067 - Brian May Bass in Cherry with Gig Bag

Cort

14315 - Cort Action 4 String Bass, Black
16763 - Cort Action DLX CRS Cherry Red Sunburst
16156 - Cort Action PJ OPB, Open Pore Black
16323 - Cort Action 4 String Lefty, Black
16769 - Cort B4 FL Plus AS OPN Fretless Bass
15379 - Cort B4 Plus Artisan 4-Strings Bass
16608 - Cort B4 Plus Artisan 4-String Lefthanded
15362 - Cort C4 Plus Artisan 4 String Bass, Open Pore
16396 - Cort GB74JJ AB Aqua Blue
12807 - Cort Jeff Berlin Rithimic 4 String Bass
15242 - Cort Jeff Berlin Rithimic 5 String Bass

Fender

16413 - Fender Aerodyne Jazz Bass Black
16606 - Fender Am Elite Jazz Bass, Ocean Turq.
15830 - Fender American Pro Jazz Bass, Sunburst
16450 - Fender American Pro Jazz Bass, Natural
15951 - Fender American Pro P Bass Olympic White
15354 - Fender American Vintage '74 Jazz Bass, 3-Col.
15533 - Fender Flea Jazz Bass, Shell Pink
16448 - Fender Geddy Lee Jazz Bass, Black
16414 - Fender FSR Jap JB62 60s J Bass Walnut
16284 - Fender JMJ Mustang Bass, F. Daphne Blue
15686 - Fender Mustang Bass PJ, Sonic Blue
8929 - Fender Roger Waters Precision Bass
16596 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass, Black, MF
16595 - Fender Std MIM Jazz Bass Candy Apple Red
16263 - Fender Standard P Bass, Brown Sunburst
11069 - G&L Tribute L2000 4 String In Blueburst
11189 - Hofner HCT Shorty Bass, Black
12188 - Hofner Ignition Violin Bass, Sunburst
4175 - Marleaux B Votan 4, White
16731 - Marvit Apoll PJ4C 4 String Bass, Used

MUSICMAN

16236 - MusicMan Caprice, Heritage Tobacco Burst
15941 - Musicman Cutlass Bass, Heritage TobBurst
16762 - PRS SE Kestrel Electric Bass, Black
14367 - PRS SE Kingfisher Bass, Natural
16761 - PRS SE Kingfisher Bass, Tortoise Shell
6919 - Rickenbacker 4003, Mapleglo
16421 - Rickenbacker 4003 Bass, Fireglo
7890 - Rickenbacker 4003, Jetglo

Spector

11197 - Spector Bass Performer 4, Red
14105 - Spector Legend Standard 4 Blue Stain
16680 - Squier Affinity P Bass PJ Pack, Black
16175 - Squier Bronco Bass, Black
16567 - Squier Classic Vibe P Bass 70s, Black
7138 - Squier Vintage Modified Jaguar, Black
15890 - Tokai Jazz Sound Bass, Secondhand

WestCoast

6446 - Westcoast BG4 Neck Thru Body, Brown
8437 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Trans Red

YAMAHA

14836 - Yamaha 2024 Bass, Sunburst, Secondhand
5634 - Yamaha BB714BS Billy Sheehan, Lava Red
15998 - Yamaha TRBX204 4-String Bass, OVSunburst
15997 - Yamaha TRBX204 4-String Electric Bass
15996 - Yamaha TRBX204 4-String Bass, Black
13138 - Yamaha TRBX304 4 String Bass In White
15999 - Yamaha TRBX504 Bass, Trans White

5 String Basses

15983 - Fender American Pro Jazz Bass V, Black
16788 - Cort A5 Plus FMMH 5 String, Black Cherry
15363 - Cort A5 Ultra Artisan 5-String Bass, Nat
15725 - Cort Action DLX 5 FGB Faded Grey Burst
14312 - Cort Action V-DLX, Cherry Red Sunburst
12538 - Cort GB75 5 String Bass, Open Pore Nat.
16526 - Cort GB75 5 String Bass, Black
16397 - Cort GB75JJ Amber Glossy 5 String Bass
15844 - Fender 5-String Jazz Bass, Blue, Used
15530 - Fender Deluxe Active Jazz Bass V, Black
16734 - Fender Dlx Active Jazz Bass V, Sunburst
13117 - Fender Deluxe Dimension Bass V Natural
15265 - G&L Tribute L2500 5 String, Blueburst
16744 - Ibanez SR30TH5 NNF
16766 - Ibanez SR30TH5PII Premium, 5-String Bass
16768 - Ibanez SR805 5-String Bass, Amber
15407 - Marleaux Contra 5, Old Violin Finish
16288 - Overwater Progress Deluxe 5, Pre-Owned
16683 - Peavey USA Cirrus 5, Bubinga, Secondhand
10960 - Pedulla Rapture Fretted 5-String Bass
16120 - Shuker Horn Bass, Trans Turqoise, Used
15343 - Spector Bass Legend 5 Custom Bubinga
16329 - Spector Coda 5 Pro Black Cherry Stain
16773 - Spector Coda 5 Pro Trans Black
12406 - Spector Legend Custom 5 String, Amber
11195 - Spector SP5BK Performer 5 in Black
16776 - Spector SP5BK Performer 5, Black Cherry
15797 - Squier Deluxe Dimension Bass V, Sunburst
9351 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass, Black, Used
8999 - Yamaha RBX5A2 5 String Bass, Black
13193 - Yamaha TRB1005J Bass, Black
16000 - Yamaha TRBX505 Bass

Acoustic Basses

10498 - Ortega D Walker Acoustic Bass, Black
15771 - Ortega D Walker Acoustic Bass, Mahog.
15117 - Takamine GB30CE Electro Acoustic Blck
14263 - Takamine GB72CE Jumbo Cutaway

Electric Upright Basses

4910 - Bridge Cetus Electric Double Bass
5110 - NS Design NXT Electric Double Bass
14482 - NS Design NXT Electric Double, Black
6360 - Yamaha SLB200 Silent Double Bass

Fretless Basses

16769 - Cort B4 FL Plus AS OPN Fretless Bass
13371 - Squier Vintage Modified Fretless Bass

String Deals

2 Sets of Elite (4 String) £25 inc P&P
2 Sets of Elite (5 String) £30 inc P&P
2 Sets of Rotosound (4 String) £25 inc P&P
2 Sets of Rotosound (5 String) £30 inc P&P
2 Sets of D'Addario (4 String) £35 inc P&P
2 Sets of D'Addario (4 String) £40 inc P&P

Bass Combos

13577 - AER Amp III Bass Amp Combo
5627 - AER Amp One (200W, 1x10)

Ashdown Engineering

15190 - Ashdown AAA 30 8 30w 1 x 8" Combo
15187 - Ashdown AAA 300 210T 300w 2 x 10"
15189 - Ashdown AAA 60 10T 60w 1 x 10"
15953 - Ashdown ABM410 Bass Combo, S/hand
8714 - Ashdown After Eight 20 Bass Combo
15192 - Ashdown B-Social Bass Amp & Bluetooth
8750 - Ashdown Perfect Ten Bass Combo
15182 - Ashdown RM C112T 500 EVO 500w
15180 - Ashdown RMC115T 500 500w 1x15
15181 - Ashdown RMC210T500 500w 2x10"
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp

EDEN

12431 - Eden EC210 2 x 10 Bass Amp Combo
13375 - Eden EC28 Bass Amp Combo
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
16046 - Eich BC112 Bass Combo
16028 - Eich BC112 Bass Combo

Fender

12686 - Fender Bronco 40 Bass Amp
13497 - Fender Rumble 100 Bass Amp Combo
4238 - Fender Rumble 15 (15W, 1x8)
12745 - Fender Rumble 200 Bass Combo
15113 - Fender Rumble 25 Bass Amp Combo
13083 - Fender Rumble 40 Bass Amp Combo
15114 - Fender Rumble 500 Bass Amp Combo
16765 - Gallien Krueger MB110 Bass Combo
16446 - Gallien Krueger MB150S/112 Combo

Hartke®

14095 - Hartke HD150 Bass Combo
9279 - Hartke Kickback 15 Bass Amp Combo

Mark bass

9004 - Markbass 121 Lite Alain Caron Combo
6239 - Mark Bass CMD102P Bass Combo
5472 - Mark Bass CMD151P J Berlin (300W)
6240 - Mark Bass Mini CMD121P (300W, 1x12)
5474 - Mark Bass Mini CMD151P (300W, 1x15W)
5475 - Mark Bass CMD121H (300W, 1x12)
9940 - Markbass Mini CMD 151 Jeff Berlin
16764 - Markbass 102 250 Richard Bona
9938 - MicroMark 801 Bass Combo

ORANGE

15715 - Orange Crush Bass 100 Amp Combo
15716 - Orange Crush Bass 25 Amp Combo
15714 - Orange Crush Bass 50 Bass Amp Combo
15111 - Orange OB1 300 Combo

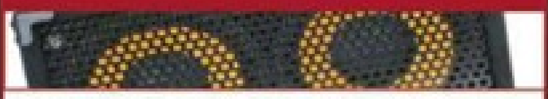
Roland

6320 - Roland CB100 (100W, 1x12)
4433 - Roland CB120XL Cube 120X (120w,1x12)
4435 - Roland Cube 20XL BASS (20W, 1x8)
4434 - Roland Cube 60XL (60W, 1x10)
5678 - Roland Microcube Bass RX, (5W, 4x4)
16758 - Vox Adio Air BS Bass Guitar Amp
16470 - Vox VX50BA Bass Amp Combo

Bass Heads

5176 - Ashdown ABM1200-EVO IV 1200w Head
14618 - Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 Bass Amp Head
15115 - ABM 600 EVO IV 600W Ashdown Bass Head
15177 - Ashdown ABM600 RC EVO IV 600W Head
14553 - Ashdown Retroglide 800 Compact Bass Head
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
13198 - Eden WTX500 Bass Amp Head
16044 - Eich T1000 Bass Amp
16043 - Eich T300 Bass Amp
16027 - Eich T500 Bass Amp
16026 - Eich T900 Bass Amp
15484 - Fender Bass Man 800
16318 - Gallien Krueger MB500 Bass Amp Head
16319 - Gallien Krueger MB500 Fusion Bass Amp H
9349 - Hartke HA2500 Bass Head
9027 - Hartke Kilo 1000 Bass Head
15588 - Hartke TX600 Bass Amplifier
14828 - Mark Bass Nano Mark 300 Bass Amp Head
10408 - MarkBass Bass MultiAmp Stereo
6243 - Mark Bass Little Mark III Bass Head 500w
9035 - Markbass Little Mark III Tube Bass Head
5244 - MarkBass Little Mark Tube 800, 800W
7962 - Markbass TTE500 Randy Jackson Bass Head
9941 - Markbass Little Mark 250 Head Black
15271 - Markbass Little Mark Ninja Bona Head
9944 - Markbass MultiAmp
15151 - Markbass Randy Jackson TTE501 Bass Head
9725 - Markbass TTE801 Randy Jackson Bass Head
15109 - Orange 4 Stroke 300 Bass Amp
15110 - Orange 4 Stroke 500 Bass Amp
6261 - Orange AD200 MK3
8231 - Orange Dark Terror Valve Guitar Head
16531 - Trace Elliot Elf 200 Watt Bass Amp Head

Bass Cabinets



13640 - Aguilar SL112 Bass Cabinet
5677 - Ashdown ABM810 (8x10)
6457 - Ashdown ABM115 Compact (1x15)
15766 - Ashdown ABM115 Compact (1x15) Used
15178 - Ashdown ABM210H EVO IV 300w 2 x 10"
15460 - Ashdown ABM210H NEO
6456 - Ashdown ABM410H (4x10)
6450 - Ashdown MAG410T Deep (4x10)
15185 - Ashdown RM210T EVO 300w 2 x 10" Cab
15183 - Ashdown RM 112T EVO 300w 1 x 12" Cab
15184 - Ashdown RM 115T EVO 300w 1 x 15" Cab
15186 - Ashdown RM 610T EVO 900w 6 x 10" Cab
16800 - BLUGuitar Nanocab
14196 - Blackstar HT Metal 412A Extension Cab
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
13195 - Eden EX210 Bass Cab
16054 - Eich 110XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16055 - Eich 110XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16041 - Eich 112XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohms
16042 - Eich 112XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohms
16075 - Eich 115L Bass Cabinet
16052 - Eich 115XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16053 - Eich 115XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16039 - Eich 1210S Bass Cabinet
16040 - Eich 1210S Bass Cabinet
16071 - Eich 210M Bass Cabinet
16069 - Eich 212L Bass Cabinet
16070 - Eich 212M Bass Cabinet
16048 - Eich 212S Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16050 - Eich 212S Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16068 - Eich 410L Bass Cabinet
16067 - Eich 610L Bass Cabinet
16061 - Eich 612XL Bass Cab
16065 - Eich 810L Bass Cabinet
16321 - Gallien Krueger CX115 Bass Cabinet
16444 - Gallien Krueger CX210 Bass Cab
16320 - Gallien Krueger MB210 Bass Amp Combo
14254 - Hartke 210XL 2 x 10" Bass Cab
5476 - Mark Bass STD104HR (4x10)
6241 - Mark Bass STD102HF (2x10)
6242 - Mark Bass STD104HF (4x10)
5477 - Mark Bass STD151HR (1x15)
9033 - Markbass Traveler 121H Bass Ext Cab
9034 - Markbass Traveler 151 P Bass Guitar Cab
4733 - Mark Bass Traveller TRV102P (2x10)
16013 - Markbass 123 Alain Caron Bass Cab
16014 - Markbass CMD Combo K1 Alain Caron
5431 - Mark Bass NY121 New York 1x 12 Bass Cab
10412 - Markbass NY122 2 x 12 Bass Cab
10409 - Markbass NY151 1 x 15 Bass Cab
10410 - Markbass NY151 RJ 1 x 15" Randy Jackson
15272 - Markbass New York 122 Ninja Bona Cab
6259 - Orange OBC115 (1x15)
6260 - Orange OBC410H (4x10)
5241 - Orange OBC810 (8x10)

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

GEAR OF THE MONTH

In which three renowned gear experts nominate their bass, amp and effects unit of the month. Whether new or old, cheap or pricey, simple or complex, this gear has earned its place in our affections through simply being brilliant...

BASS

The Spector NS2 is a classic bass design that remains extremely popular the world over. It came about in 2004 when luthier Stuart Spector chose to make a cheaper, European-manufactured version of his US flagship bass. This offered bassists the Spector playing experience in a more affordable package – and even Stuart himself couldn't have predicted how popular these new Euro models would be. Made in the Czech Republic to Stuart's exact specification and standards, the Euro 4 LX features EMG pickups, a two-band Tone Pump circuit which provides an 18-volt circuit performance from a single 9-volt battery, a hefty locking brass bridge, Schaller machine heads and a brass nut. These all point to an instrument that means business. The 3D curved body and maple through-neck are flanked by alder and maple wings and a rosewood fingerboard with trademark crown inlays, completing the features list at a fraction of the cost of its US sibling. Tonally, this is a beast! Take it easy with the volume and bass boost, as the circuit is a tad overpowering, but as an all-rounder, the Euro LX is highly recommended, no matter what style you play.

Mike Brooks

AMP

Since its introduction in 2009, the Markbass Mini CMD 121P has consistently been at the top of the sales charts. Reliable and well made, the original CMD 121 redefined what could be expected of a small bass amp. The latest version, gradually improved and refined over the last eight years or so, is even more impressive than its predecessors – with 400 watts, a superb neo 12" driver, a HF unit and a comprehensive but easy-to-use preamp. There's an excellent EQ and a full range of pro-level routing options, basically the same as those on the Little Mark III head. Unusually for a small bass combo, there's a balanced XLR input too, which is perfect for acoustic players who want to use a mic rather than a piezo pickup. That kind of spec turns something that looks like a practice combo into an amp suitable for most small gigs and rehearsals. Add a Markbass NY121 extension cab and you have a full-fat 500W gigging rig; compact, but with extraordinary amounts of undistorted, clean and extended low end. The strength of the euro means that the tiny CMD 121P will now set you back the thick end of £800 – so is it really worth that much? Definitely.

Kev Sanders

FX UNIT

For the bass player who wants to experiment with chords, few effects give as much joy as tremolo. From approximating the sound of a Leslie cabinet to choppy, synth-like rhythmic patterns, the variety of sounds that tremolo can create when applied to a bass ranges from subtle to chaotic. As with all effect types, the tremolo pedals out there range from simple effects that produce a narrow band of sounds really well, through to full-on multi-FX units that combine every imaginable parameter with every other effect known to humanity. This now-defunct ToneCore Tap Tremolo pedal was part of Line 6's mostly-excellent ToneCore pedal range and examples still crop up second-hand. It has a couple of vital features. Firstly, it's a stereo pedal; a lot of tremolo pedals are mono, but that loses so much of the spatial capability of the sound we associate with tremolo. The other indispensable option is

> "THE TAP TREMOLO HANDLED TAP TEMPO IN A REALLY CLEVER WAY, WITHOUT ADDING A TON OF EXTRA BUTTONS AND TAKING UP MORE SPACE ON YOUR PEDALBOARD"

tap tempo; the speed of the tremolo, whether you are syncing it to a specific rhythm or not, is a crucial aspect of the sound – and you'll often want to vary it mid-song. The Tap Tremolo handled tap tempo in a really clever way, without adding a ton of extra buttons and taking up more space on your pedalboard. It's definitely worth keeping an eye out online for a second-hand one, or checking the dusty corners of your local music shop for old stock.

Steve Lawson

POWER BASS

Advice for reducing bassist injury risk from bassist and physiotherapist Ben Whybrow. This month: busting bass-playing posture myths

The relationship between posture and pain is a controversial topic. It's often thought that the aches and pains that we bassists – and musicians in general – develop are due to 'poor' posture, and that if we play in a 'correct' position it would be better for us. However, all is not as it seems.

There's been a huge amount of research on posture, mostly focused on the general public rather than specifically on musicians, most of which is of pretty poor quality with lots of bias. Respected studies have generally found no association between musicians with and without pain and the way they sit and stand. For a long time it's been assumed without any real evidence that sitting or standing upright in an 'aligned' position – definitions of which vary widely – is best. Sadly, when people force themselves to do this consistently it can cause or exacerbate more problems than it prevents.

Furthermore, people's opinions of what good and bad posture may be is variable. There is no consensus on postural definitions in healthcare, so most of our ingrained beliefs about posture are based on questionable assumptions rather than actual data. However, we do know that the most significant determining factor for posture and the pain it causes is time. If you stay in the same position for long enough, regardless of how 'good' or 'bad' it is, it will begin to hurt and you will want to move.

Your body can be put in all sorts of funky positions whilst playing bass, and providing you change these positions frequently, even the weirdest of playing postures won't significantly increase your risk. In fact, placing your body in different positions from time to time for short periods may help to retain flexibility and allow your tissues to tolerate a greater variety of movement.

Some common relaxed bass-playing seated postures are below. None of these is any better or worse than the others, provided that you regularly change your position.

In summary, practise and perform in a variety of different postures, changing them frequently – but don't overanalyse how you do it!

www.thejudophysio.com; @TheJudoPhysio

APPLIED IMPROVISATION WITH ROCKSCHOOL

Twelve-tone improvisation with the great Joe Hubbard

Historically, students are taught to improvise over chord changes using chord tones and scales applied to the harmonic structure they are playing over. This approach relies on the student recognising and understanding common cadences and tonalities that are established as a result. This understanding is based on the diatonic and non-diatonic systems of harmony, where the ear can make the connection between the lines that are played, related to the underlying harmonic structure.

Of course, truly understanding this provides us with the foundation of improvisation, but only as a means to an end and not the end in itself. This is where 12-tone improvisation comes in to change the improvisational landscape. Many are led to believe that 12-tonal improvisation is random or free expression with no rules, but even Arnold Schönberg – who was considered by many as the father of 12-tone music – claimed that an emphasis must be regarded in the fundamental components of structure.

Structure is a very important word when it comes to improvisation, because the ear naturally conforms to structure of any type. When a student learns that 10 notes of the chromatic scale can be resolved to over a dominant 7th chord, they do the maths and often think that they can just about play anything over that chord. When this proves unsuccessful, they are often left scratching their heads in disbelief wondering why it doesn't work. The reason this doesn't work is because what they attempted to play was based on randomness and had no structure!

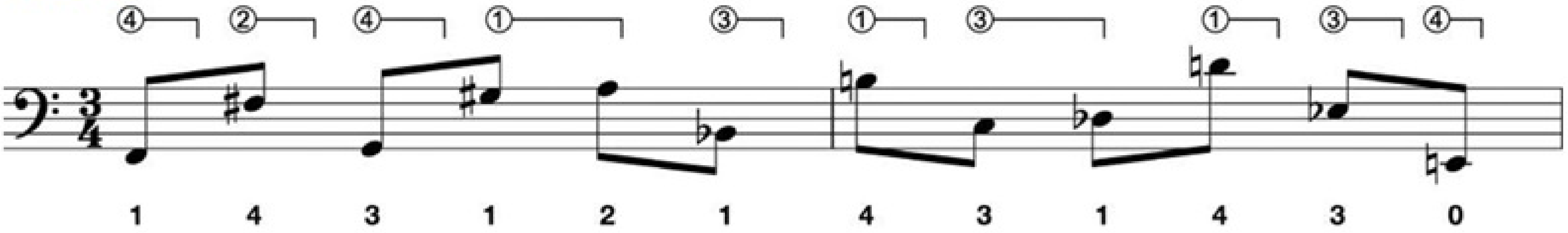
In 12-tone improvisation, the principle of structure lies in the organisation of its intervals, where the distance from one note to the next regulates the structural blueprint that the human ear relates to. With that said, this provides us with a way where we can generate musical lines that go outside the parameters of traditional functional harmony.

The exercise shown is based on what is called a 12-tone row, which is a series of non-repetitive notes using the chromatic scale. Notice how it creates a different interval structure, rather than just going up in minor 2nds. The resulting pattern comprises: up a minor 9th; down a major 7th; up a minor 9th; up a minor 2nd; down a major 7th; up a minor 9th; down a major 7th; up a minor 2nd; up a minor 9th; down a major 7th; and down a major 7th.

This proves to be a great technical exercise, along with understanding that this line will actually work over any chord type, as long as you know where to resolve your line to over the corresponding chord type. Understanding resolution requires a good working knowledge of functional harmony, which goes beyond the scope of this article. Learn the exercise as written and, once you are comfortable, start moving this pattern up in minor 2nds. Enjoy! ■

"STRUCTURE IS A VERY IMPORTANT WORD WHEN IT COMES TO IMPROVISATION, BECAUSE THE EAR NATURALLY CONFORMS TO STRUCTURE OF ANY TYPE"

EXAMPLE 1



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STAR BASS

Welcome to our new feature celebrating the great — and the rather less great! — work of an acclaimed bass player. Kicking off the series, Joe Shooman salutes the incomparably great James Jamerson

James Lee Jamerson has to be the most famous non-credited, most underrated bassist in history – underrated, that is, unless you happen to be a bass player yourself. Jamerson's work with Motown in the 1960s as part of the legendary Funk Brothers studio session players included 30 Number 1 singles. Jamerson's bass lit up the likes of the Supremes' 'You Can't Hurry Love' (1966), Martha & The Vandellas' 'Dancing In The Street' (1964) and Marvin Gaye's extraordinary 1971 album *What's Going On*. His bouncy lines revolutionised the way the instrument operated within a band; setting down funky runs, utilising chromatics, ghost notes, open strings and innovative syncopated lines that hit the beat hard while creating an irresistible feel of energy and nuance. In the 1970s he worked with Smokey Robinson, Ben E King and Robert Palmer among others, but fashion turned its back on Jamerson's style toward the early 1980s. He died in 1983 of heart failure and other alcohol-related complications – but his legacy survives him.

MUST-HAVE ALBUM

Marvin Gaye

What's Going On (1971)

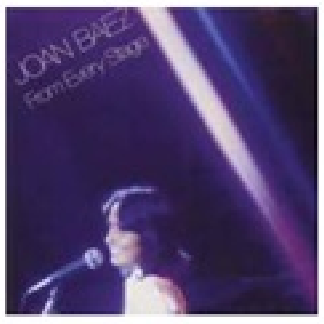
Legend has it that Jamerson was peeled from a nearby bar to play on *What's Going On*. Whether the story about him being so drunk he had to lie on the floor is true or not, the title track's energetic groove is laid down masterfully. Other versions of the story have him horizontal while he got stuck into the bouncy 'What's Happening Brother'; either way this is distilled, nuanced Jamerson at his creative best. His 1962 Fender Precision – the Funk Machine – was as a rule strung with LaBella heavy flatwounds, with foam under the bridge cover, and an unusually high action. The Hook – his right index finger – was in fine fettle, even if the rest of him wasn't. The album credits him as 'The Incomparable James Jamerson', and his playing on this classic album proves it.

WORTHY CONTENDER

Stevie Wonder

For Once In My Life (1968)

Stevie Wonder's uptempo version of this album's title track, initially a slow torch song, has become the benchmark for the opus ever since – and much credit has to go to Jamerson's contribution. His largely improvised, fluid line shows his flexible approach to the instrument; rather than sit in the pocket, lumbering along with the roots of the chords, he playfully interacts with the singer, working up and down the neck, transitioning on open strings and delivering near-arpeggios in doing so. With Stevie himself operating in his trademark smooth mode, the bass part provides the movement underneath. A high point is the song 'You Met Your Match', a blueprint for funk bass, working with the drum patterns and slinking around them at equal turn. It's not all funk and games, though: Jamerson shows he has restraint on the pared-down work on 'God Bless The Child', which reminds the listener of his early work as a stand-up acoustic bass player.



WILD CARD

Joan Baez

From Every Stage (1976)

Yet another side of Jamerson is in evidence here – in a folk context, no less. The great singer-songwriter Joan Baez certainly knew what she was doing when she took him on tour in 1975. Her songs were often fragile, and the space within the songs isn't intruded upon by James's laid-back grooves. Check out the likes of the Bob Dylan-penned 'Forever Young' for evidence of his subtlety. It's a softly-spoken bass we encounter on disc 2, where Baez is backed by the band rather than performing solo; Jamerson's depth of emotion there is palpable. Thankfully, he's also back in full-on joyfully groovin' mode on 'Oh Happy Day' – an unmistakably Jamerson piece of work that slinks through the lower and higher registers with ease and aplomb. The bassist's bottomy tone and wideband sound here suggests he may have used his trusty Ampeg B-15 session amp onstage, possibly DI'd to the desk.

COOL GROOVES

Four Tops

Reach Out (1967)

Pure Motown is the sound we hear here, and we've also got quite possibly the quintessential Jamerson bass-line on the magnificent 'Bernadette' – featuring arpeggios, blues runs and even the magic of a false ending. This was the sound on which a legendary label was born, with the Funk Brothers house band on unbelievably good form throughout. The album featured writing by classic composers such as Holland-Dozier-Holland, Neil Diamond, Smokey Robinson and Stevie Wonder, among others, all of whose songwriting benefited immensely from Jamerson's intuitive bass parts. Of course, the Four Tops themselves were a class act all round; the addition of these unearthly bass parts simply added to the sonic perfection. The single, '7-Rooms Of Gloom', is all minor chords and crying at the sky, but the band also get stuck right in to the Monkees'/Neil Diamond's 'I'm A Believer'. It's another typically jumping line from Jamerson, of the kind he could deliver in his sleep.

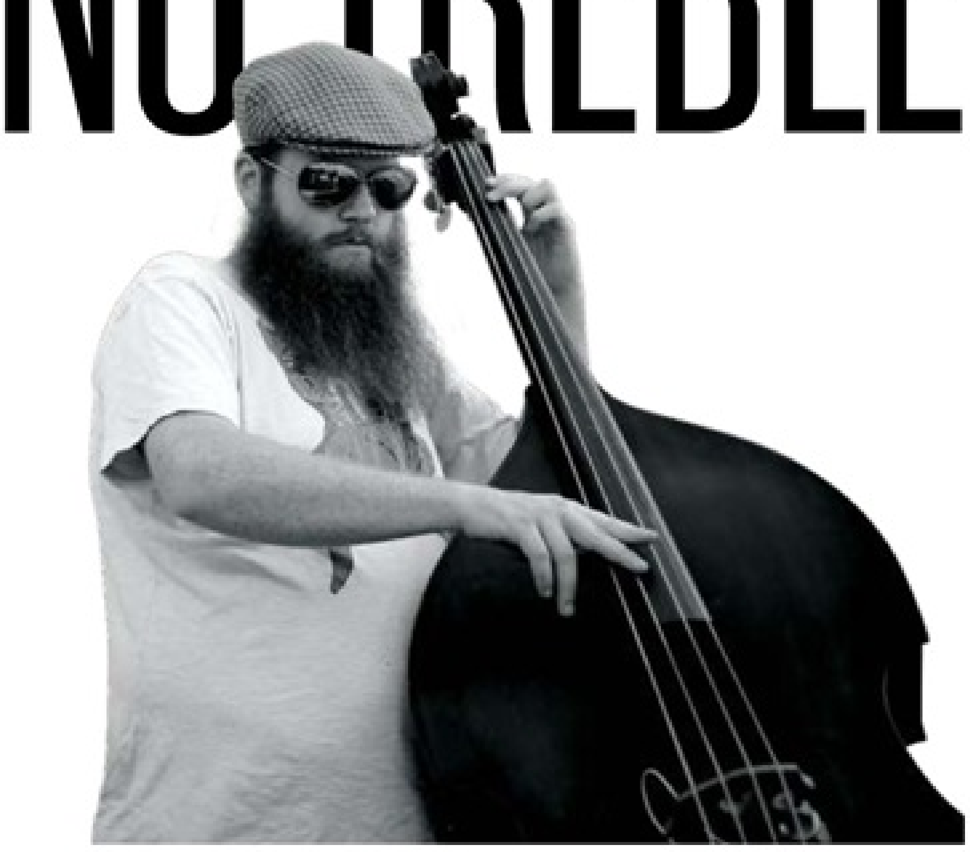
AVOID AT ALL COSTS

Kenneth Koontz

Dream Woman (2012)

Notable as one of Jamerson's final recordings, and originally recorded in the early 1980s before sitting on a shelf for 30 years, this single is hard to love. Of course, any Jamerson recording has to be respected, even from his twilight years; unfortunately, the song in which this one appears isn't particularly appealing, to our ears at least. The bass playing's fine, of course, but the saccharine, swathed-in-synth production is an insult to the true soul of the Motown era. Perhaps this song is best viewed in context; given Jamerson's problems offstage, and his increasing isolation from the world of music, from which he took refuge in a fug of alcohol, there's a sadness about it that is inescapable. That his career and life could have dipped into working with mediocrity such as this is a tragedy. But what a legacy the man left; the art of bass was changed forever by James Jamerson. Incomparable, indeed.

NO TREBLE



Kevin Johnson of No Treble looks back — and forward

As much as we love all the new and exciting ways people are using the bass, we also know that there's no school like the old school. That's why one of our favorite columns is our 'Stories Behind The Songs' series where we interview bassists with prolific recording careers about 10 of their favorite songs from their catalogue. This month we had the pleasure of chatting with Kenny Passarelli, whose resumé includes work with Elton John, Joe Walsh, Stephen Stills, Hall & Oates, Dan Fogelberg and more.

The seasoned veteran is renowned for his early adoption of the fretless Precision bass, though he used several axes throughout his career. He utilised the fretless on every track for Joe Walsh's 'The Smoker You Drink, The Player You Get' except for the smash hit he co-wrote, 'Rocky Mountain Way'.

"I used Joe's Jazz bass on that," he said. "If you listen to it real close, there's one thing I do where I play this weird little sound where you can tell it's not a fretless bass. People ask, 'What's your approach to bass?' Well, it's called a conversation. I'm listening to the lyrics, and I'm listening to the instruments, and I'm conversing with the low frequencies."

Other songs from the conversation include Walsh's 'A Life of Illusion', Stephen Stills' 'In The Way', Freddie King's 'Sweet Home Chicago' and more, but it's Elton John's 'Chameleon' from the 1976 album *Blue Moves* that he considers his finest work. "I feel this might be one of my best performances in terms of playing all the styles I was influenced by, whether it was Jamerson or other people I was listening to," he explains. "It all came together on that song. It was cut live – we just played it through."

It was another great month for new basses. No Treble readers were most excited by the slick Thundercat signature bass from Ibanez. He's been using it live for a handful of years now, but the company has finally released the hollow-body six-string as an option from their Japanese custom shop. The TCB1006 features curly maple for the back and sides, with a quilted maple top finished in an Autumn Leaf Burst matte. Its pickup system allows for dialling in all the crazy sounds Thundercat is known for, with a pair of EMG 45HZ magnetic pickups and a Graph Tech Ghost system that offers piezo and MIDI.

Whether you're shooting for a modern or vintage sound, the important thing is to keep playing. See you next month!

www.notreble.com

BASSCHAT

Basschat gets a spanking new interface; Silvia Bluejay explains it

Basschat's staff noticed the need for a major user interface upgrade as early as 2012, and set out to make it happen by recruiting external developers. For a variety of reasons, each new developer left abruptly after a few months, leaving the job unfinished. Fast forward to 2017 and, thanks to the hard work of admin and in-house developer Charic, and owner Ped, the new site is finally here.

Why did we need an upgrade? Well, the old platform was running on obsolete, unsupported software, causing a rapidly increasing risk of spam and security breaches, no matter how hard the admin team worked to plug holes behind the scenes. The number of user functions that didn't work properly in the old software was also constantly on the rise. The only option was to migrate the entire site database to new software. What could possibly go wrong?

The long-awaited update was rolled out in the night between 10 and 11 November and, for a few days, Basschat looked deceptively familiar but felt very different, leaving our community interestingly confused. It was a struggle particularly for those who found the new site so slow and prone to crashing as to be initially unusable. We all took to copying and pasting error messages for Charic to study and act upon, and posting long bug lists.

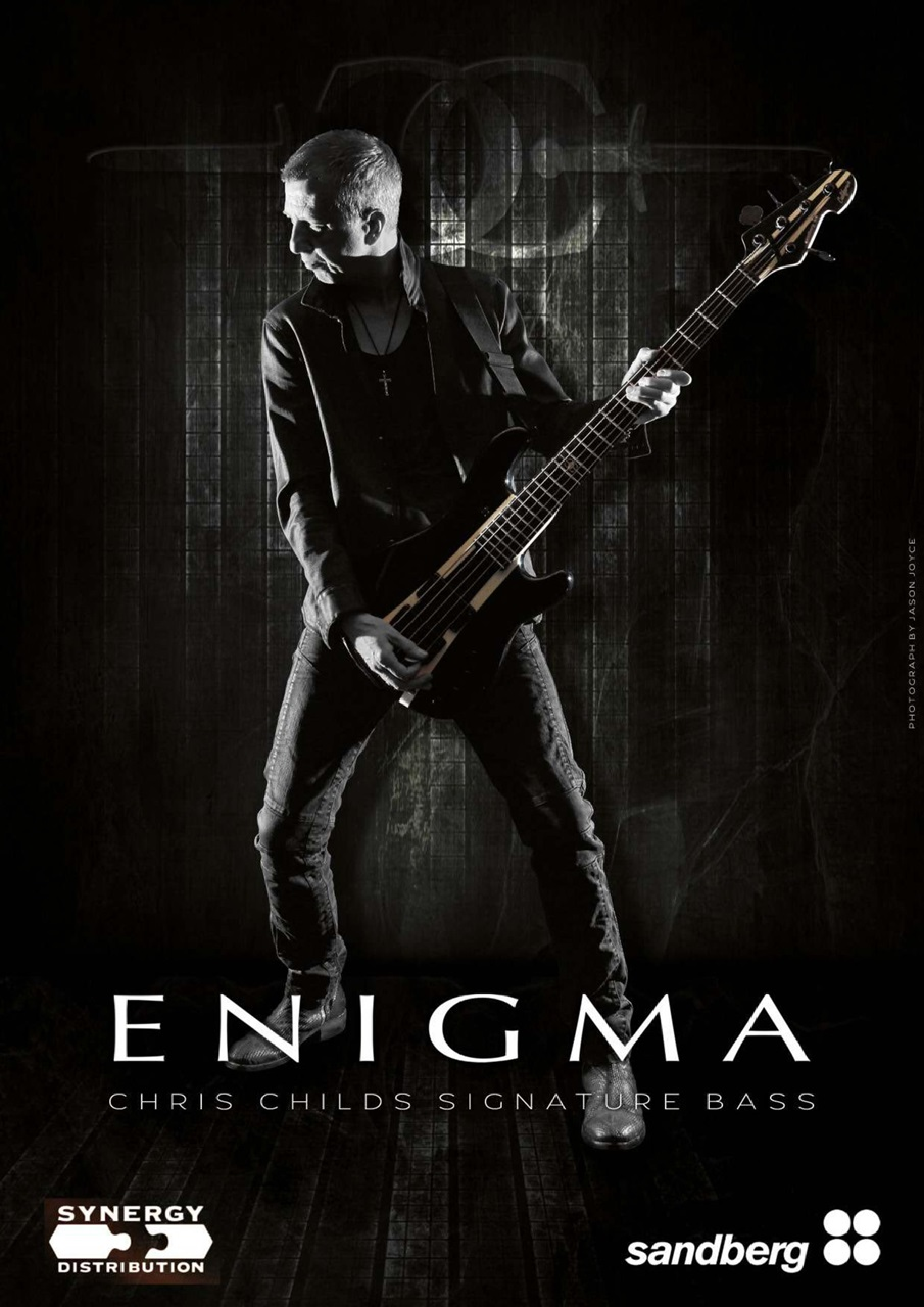
Those for whom the site wasn't exceedingly slow seemed happy with the upgrade, and were busy finding out where their favourite functions had ended up on the page. The only problem with no solution is the incompatibility between the old and new private messaging systems: all Basschat members have lost the whole of their communication history – time to get talking to each other again from scratch!

At the time of writing, the site is still a work in progress, but is operating much more smoothly, and most of us have had the time to get to grips with it. Bouquets and brickbats are still being liberally distributed, but even the most curmudgeonly members acknowledge Charic and Ped's hard work, and have switched from sulking and rubbishing the upgrade to suggesting useful tweaks. The most popular improvements are the all-new mobile interface, which is simply a smaller, 'thinner' version of the desktop site (and works properly), and the presence, in each post, of reaction buttons, such as 'Like', 'Haha' etc., similar to those on Facebook.

We can also tag and attract the attention of other Basschatters by preceding their name with an '@', Twitter-style, or send each other bright yellow 'sticky notes' which we really can't pretend not to see. The notification settings, once tweaked to our individual liking, are more versatile and useful than previously, especially for moderators, who need to keep an eye on the forum's goings-on all the time. Incidentally, if you tend to use rude words in your posts, you may find that our updated swear filter is no longer limited to adding a few asterisks: it's rather more creative.

We have been promised for the near future a much improved Basschat Shop, a user-friendly control panel to manage our Marketplace subscriptions (with price reductions for repeat subscribers), and a beefed-up Search function, which is being implemented in stages to avoid excessive slowdowns. If you're not yet a Basschat member, now's the time to sign up and join us!

www.basschat.co.uk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"THERE WAS A TIME WHEN WE ALMOST COULDN'T GET ARRESTED"

STRANGLE HOLD

Forty-four years since they formed, the Stranglers are busier than ever before. Bassist extraordinaire Jean-Jacques Burnel explains how he continues to defeat the paradigm, armed with a state of pure mental flow and some mouthwatering bass gear...

Interview: Joel McIver Photos: Joseph Branston

Not punks, but accepted by the punks because they looked hard and played aggressively. Not prog, even though they played songs in 'difficult' time signatures. More than rock, bigger than pop... the Stranglers were and remain all those things and more, a unique band of personalities who defy categories and have done since they were formed all the way back in 1974.

That the Somerset-based group – Jean-Jacques Burnel (vocals, bass), Baz Warne (guitar), Dave Greenfield (keyboards) and Jet Black (drums) – are not only still going, but are busier than ever, is very much an achievement by anyone's standards.

"Over the last five or six years, we haven't stopped," says Burnel, sipping a cuppa in the rehearsal room at Stranglers HQ near Bath. "We're fulfilling a demand to play everywhere. Any musician would jump at that chance, to be honest. We've been all over the world lately, and doing lots of tours and festivals."

"That said," he reflects, "being that busy doesn't give you the time to collect your thoughts and see what you want to do musically. There comes a time when you really need to collect your thoughts."

What does that take – a week off?

"It needs a bit longer than that!" he laughs. "I'm lucky because I live in the mountains in the south of France, so I can fuck off on my motorcycle for a few days with a sleeping bag and get lost. That brings you back down to a state of what the Japanese call *mushin*, empty mind, and that's when you can start getting creative. I've got about 150 songs that I need to cull and go through and see if they actually make sense."

BGM last featured Burnel on the cover in 2014, when he told us that the Stranglers were at a decision point. This was largely down to the health of drummer Jet Black, then 75 years old and battling illness; the situation was resolved when Black stepped down from touring, with his place taken for gigs by Jim MacAulay. Since then the band haven't stopped moving, travelling upwards from a place of genuine despair in the 1990s.

"Twenty years ago we were at rock bottom, after Hugh [Cornwell, frontman] had gone," recalls the bassist. "Our record

contracts weren't renewed and we went around in ever-decreasing circles for quite a few years. I lost interest as well. I suppose I was semi-detached from the Stranglers; I'd lost my mojo, I believe is the expression. I'd also lost my mate Hugh; we used to bounce off each other, because that was the best way to write songs. Then Baz joined the band and we started writing again, because now I had someone to write with."

He continues: "It all turned around with *Norfolk Coast* (2004), which was an album that I had to write because my marriage was on the rocks, as were the Stranglers. Fortunately my publisher, who has always had faith in the band and our songwriting, told me to go somewhere and write honest songs. That renewed my faith in the whole process; I wrote two albums in a week!

"Everything started becoming positive. My wife and I separated and then divorced, and the Stranglers became a four-piece, and everything clicked again. I started enjoying playing some old songs again that I previously hadn't wanted to play, and the vibe and the band dynamic changed. *Suite XVI* (2006) was well received, and *Giants* (2012) was very well received, and we were back to a good place, for a bunch of old musicians. There was a time when we almost couldn't get arrested, and then suddenly that was all by the by and forgotten. We're having the time of our lives and we're more motivated to write again and record."

Does inspiration flow as easily as ever, after all these years?

"Well – you're a bass player, you know what it's like. There's nothing better than playing your chosen instrument with people around you who are up for listening to it. The Stranglers has always relied on being a tight unit, rhythmically, and I've got some good basses."

At this point Burnel hands me his main Jon Shuker bass, a beautiful instrument built along the lines of the Fender Precisions which he played for years. "It's basically a copy of a Fender P, but slightly better," he says. "The quality of finish is light years ahead. There's about six different woods in the body and there are empty resonance chambers in the body, plus it has a carbon graphite neck. I have two of these. It's passive but the output is phenomenal."

At 65, Burnel is famously youthful-looking, presumably due to a lifetime of martial arts and a seventh dan in karate. But a heavy bass will take its toll on anyone if you play it long enough, and the relatively lightweight Shuker has been a godsend in that respect, he says. "My back is much better these days, now that I've got a much lighter guitar. You spend four or five hours in here with a heavy Fender P and it'll make your stance off-sided. That's one of the reasons why I had this one built."

"THERE'S NOTHING BETTER THAN PLAYING YOUR CHOSEN INSTRUMENT WITH PEOPLE AROUND YOU WHO ARE UP FOR LISTENING TO IT"

Another pitfall of older age which we can all look forward to is diminishing hearing, of course. As Burnel explains: "I prefer in-ear monitors; they help lessen the sound on stage, and it helps the audience have a better sound because the out-front man can control it better. We had them moulded, which is expensive but worth it, and during the moulding the woman told me, 'You're a bass player; you shouldn't be losing your hearing as much as you have. What else do you do?' and I said 'I've been riding motorcycles since I was 16' and she said 'That's it!' The wind noise was what did it. You know how the guitarist and the drummer are always the first to lose their hearing? Drummers suffer because of the cymbals. Well, it was the wind for me, because I never wore earplugs when I was riding. I wear them now..."

As we set up for the photo shoot, Burnel runs the Shuker through its paces, delivering his famous thunderous tone through his signature Ashdown JJB500 rig. For the Stranglers' forthcoming March tour dates, he'll be bringing some serious amplification along.

"I've been using 8x10s and a couple of 15s, live," he says. "The sound I get is a combination of what the soundman does and how I play it. It's all in the hands." He illustrates this last point with a fearsome blast of distortion, achieved by digging the pick in hard near the neck. "I have a couple of tones. Sometimes I use fingers, sometimes a pick, it depends on what's needed. I think it'd be disingenuous just to use my heavy, growly bass sound on every single song."

When we ask him how he's evolved over the years as a bass player, he explains "I'm not as busy a player as I might have been at some points," which develops into a conversation about less being more in bass world – and then a related discussion about the concept of 'flow', the intuitive frame of mind which all musicians love.

"It's rare, isn't it?" he ponders. "Those moments when you're at the right tempo, you're playing the right notes, the groove is just perfect, the harmonies are right, you can hear everything clearly... it's a moment of ecstasy. You're not looking at your frets, and everything just works. The next night, you're fumbling all over stuff, but there are times when your fingers automatically go where they're supposed to go.

"We try to rehearse without looking at our guitars," he explains. "Sometimes we fuck up, but the more you can do that, the more you know the piece and the more you're free to play with it. You don't need to concentrate on the song and you can look at the audience. Of course, you might hit the wrong fret while you're rehearsing, but usually by the time of the gig I can play most of the songs, including some of the fast runs that I do, without looking. If you know the material that well, then you're free, and you can adapt it to who you are at that moment. And then you're not going through the motions; you're playing the same notes but they sound different, because you feel different."

Although the Stranglers aren't close to being a jam band, focusing on tight, economical songwriting, they do let loose a bit on stage. "We do quite a lot of improvisation over a few chords," says Burnel. "On 'Walk On By' [the Bacharach/ David cover from 1978] we do quite a long extended part, which is different every time. I experiment all the time, up to the point where it sounds a bit jazzy... that's a euphemism!"

"The point is that if you're going to be mechanical and do the same thing every night," he says, "you might as well give them the record. But if your music is meant to be an extension of you, in different humours on different days, that's the magic, both for the musician and the listener."

So where does this leave the Stranglers in 2018? Our man sums up.

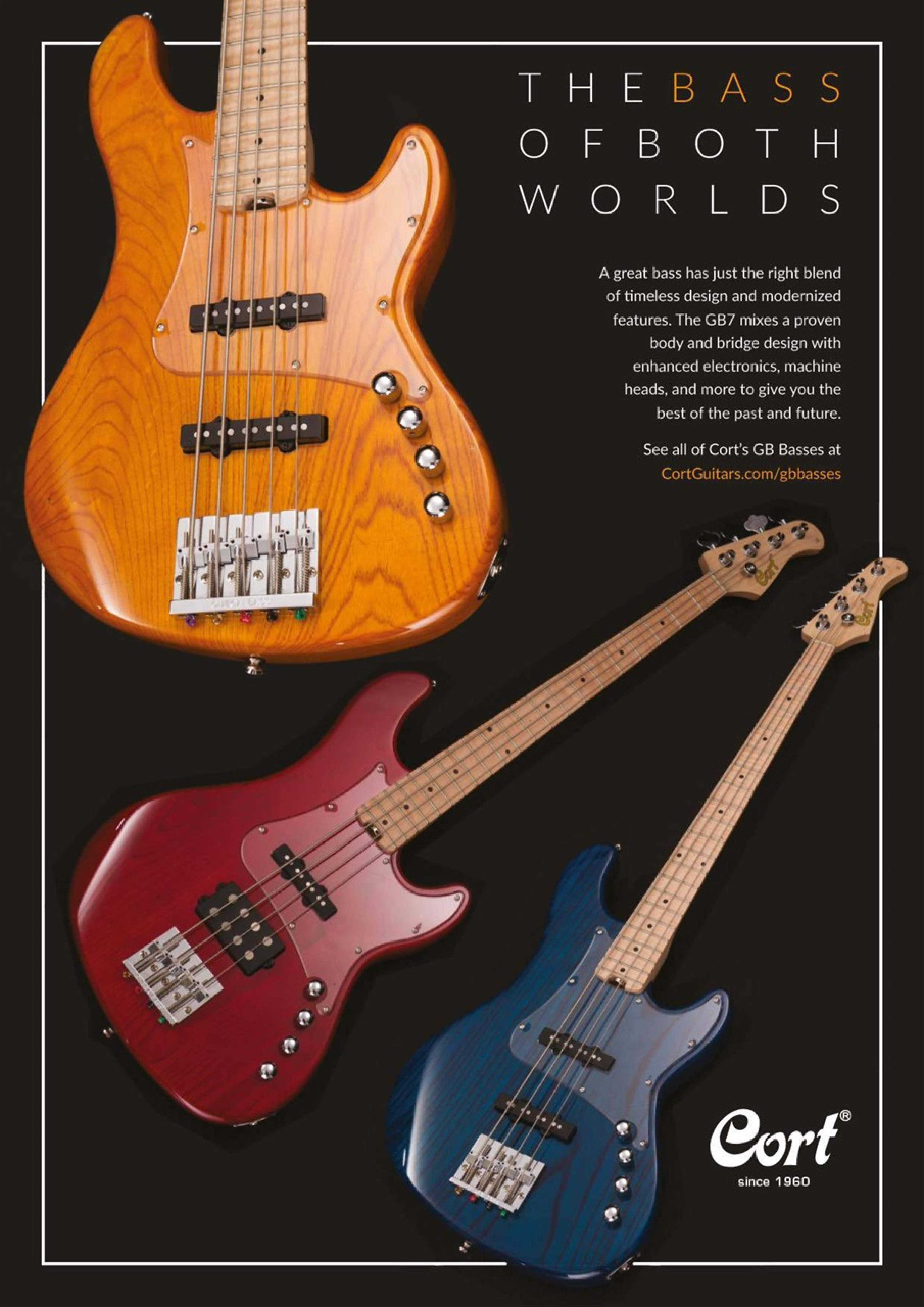
"At the moment we're just a bunch of old bastards who are enjoying what they're doing," he replies diplomatically. "It's just like anyone's life. If you're in a group, there's a certain dynamic, and it's not always the nicest dynamic because people evolve at different levels. Once you reach a certain age, though, you've worked your stuff out and you've got a better chance of surviving together. It's obvious when you're just going through the motions; the public notice that very quickly. And the danger is that you'll repeat the success you had, which is toxic. Fortunately we've got so many tunes to

choose from that we can change the set every night, and it does; we're not stuck."

Did he ever look this far ahead in 1974? "When we started out, no bands expected to last 44 years! We're in uncharted territory," he chuckles. "We've had the luxury of never disbanding, just evolving, and it's helped me that the personnel has changed. The most important thing for me is that we're creative, we're productive, and we're having a gas. Most of our music hasn't dated, although some of it has, largely down to the production at the time they were recorded, but we're still writing edgy stuff that is pertinent. We observe; I like to observe the world and know what's happening. There's no shortage of inspiration, and we're not seeking commercial success. You want what you do to be loved, but if you seek that, it's the tail wagging the dog."

He concludes: "You don't think that you'll reach your 60s and still be jumping about like a teenage fool and enjoying it – with people enjoying the music, and recycling it. I see a movie, and there's a song in there that I wrote 40 years ago! To me, that is cool." That's an understatement, if you ask us.

The Stranglers will tour the UK this March with Therapy? in support. Info: www.thestranglers.net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JOIN THE Q

Fifty million albums and five decades along, Suzi Quatro isn't stopping for anyone

Interview: Alison Richter Pics: Tina K

More than a decade ago, Suzi Quatro – or Dr Suzi Quatro, as she was made an Honorary Doctor of Music by Anglia Ruskin University at Cambridge last year – recorded a song called '15 Minutes Of Fame'. By that time, the singer, songwriter, bassist, producer, actress, radio host, and author had long defied those odds.

"I should change it to 'Fifty-Three Years Of Fame'," she laughs. "What can I tell you? It's my profession and I love it to this day. Every time I step onto the stage it's like the first gig all over again. I love what I do. When I come off the stage and I go into the dressing room, I often say to my husband, 'I feel like me now'. I've done it my whole life, I take what I do very seriously, and I like to make it real for the people. I'm all about communication, entertainment, and creation. Those are my three key words."

In September, Chrysalis Records released *The Best of Suzi Quatro: Legend*, a digitally remastered compilation that she curated. It's not her first such package, but it is a special one in that it doesn't only include her most famous hits, but also some of her favourite album tracks.

"My record company wanted to put something out, and I wanted to make it different," she says. "Hence the 20 tracks that I've chosen as personal favourites from my catalogue. I went through everything and it wasn't easy. I have favourites on every album that I'm so proud of. On this compilation I picked all the songs that made it from album to stage. The only one we didn't do live was 'Hollywood', and I don't know why. I think it's because the mood isn't 'me' live, but it's a great song. So there's a good cross-section of my own songs, and I think I satisfied everyone."

Her story is well documented. Born and raised in Detroit, Quatro spent her formative years in bands with her sisters, was discovered by producer Mickie Most, signed to a solo deal, travelled to London to record, and released her self-titled debut in 1973. She has released 15 studio albums, 10 compilations, and one live album, with total sales exceeding 55 million. It would be easy to rest on that legacy, but she built her career on personal integrity and respect for her fans. That means constantly writing and recording new material, spending time on the road, and finding new ways to express herself.

She published her autobiography, *Unzipped*, in 2006, later a book of poetry, *Through My Eyes*, and her first novel, *The Hurricane*, earlier this year. In addition to her solo career, she is part of QSP with Andy Scott from The Sweet and Don Powell from Slade. Their self-titled debut album, first released in Australia, where it charted in the Top 20, is now available worldwide. "I'm excited about it," she says. "We created something special."

Quatro taught herself to play on a Fender Precision bass, a gift from her jazz musician father, Art, when she was 14. "I'm looking at it as I'm talking to you," she says. "I was given a 1957 Fender Precision, and if you're not jealous enough, a Fender Bassman amp too. So it's like, 'OK, somebody has decreed that I'm going to be a real bass player'. What luck! I can't pretend I knew it was a hard bass to play. I didn't know any better. This is what I was given, so learn it I did. I climbed the mountain first time up. I just bought a reissue P-Bass that looks exactly the same, and I take that out on tour. The old one hangs on my wall."

She played a number of basses throughout her career, but eventually returned to her roots. "On *Skin Tight Skin* it would have been my Les Paul Professional Recording bass," she says. "Even men don't like to play it because it's so heavy, but I carried that thing around London. I don't know how I did that. I honestly don't know. I played my Gibson EB-0, then I went on to the Ripper. *Back To*

The Drive was a Fender. I had a Jazz bass which I used a lot, and I recently purchased the reissue. On *Rock Hard* and *Suzi... And Other Four Letter Words* I was sponsored by BC Rich, who made basses for me. I have them upstairs.

"I've gone back to Fender; as you do when you get older, you come home. I take two Jazz basses on the road. The neck is a tiny bit slimmer for when I do my solo. I use the Precision in the studio because the Precision is the only bass that exists – and I mean the *only* bass that exists – that you can plug directly into the board and it's perfect. The thickness of the wood, the shape of the body, and that thick neck, and shame on you if you play that bass with a pick. Shame on you! I never mastered a pick; even when I tried it, I didn't like it. I like the sound and the feel of the skin of my fingers plucking those strings. It's magic. You have so much texture.

"I had Boogie amps for a long time. I had Ampeg, I had Acoustic, I've been through various things. I'm using Boogie at the moment. Every now and again they come up with a brand new bass amp, because bass has always been the most difficult instrument to amplify because of the low in their tones. What suits you onstage is too boomy for the front guy, and when he gets it like he wants it, it's too trebly for you, so it's always a real balance system. I've got it down pat now. It helped a lot when I had in-ears for about five years. That's when I perfected it, because I started listening to the finer points. I got fed up with the in-ears and went back to using monitors, and I heard what I heard in my ears so close that now I can get that onstage."

Aged six, Quatro saw Elvis Presley on television and immediately knew what she wanted to do with her life. As her musical vocabulary expanded, so did her influences, and to this day she still draws from those artists when she writes. "When I want to play bass, there are albums that I jam to," she says. "One is Otis Redding's first album *Pain In My Heart*, another is *Eric Clapton Live At Budokan*, Roy Buchanan, all the old Motown hits – those are all real good for your chops. I'm a mood girl, so if I'm in the mood to hear great lyrics, I play Bob Dylan. If I'm in a mood to dance around the patio, I play my Motown tapes. When I'm writing rock and roll on the piano, I go outside on the patio and listen to Tony Bennett. I play different things for each area that I'm in in my brain.

"I find that whatever I pick – movie or music – when I'm creating, they are not the mood enhancer; they're the mood relief. It's all about balance. The main thing as an artist is to keep all of those creative channels open. You're always learning. You should be. I still go onstage before a show and change something in the set that I've done for 25 years. I'm always looking for improvement and not taking anything for granted. I don't want that attitude. You have to go out there and kill it every time."

Quatro once remarked "Artists, by their nature, are never satisfied". She stands by that comment, but at the same time she is capable of objectivity onstage and in the studio. "I can critique myself," she says. "I can watch a live show as the audience and say, 'That worked and that didn't'. I did the same thing when I put this album together. I stepped back and listened. That's the key to everything. I just feel that if I stick to what is real with whatever I'm doing, as long as it comes from inside my heart, you're going to feel it. That's my criterion as an artist. I want to touch you and leave you with something."

www.suziquatro.com

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Korn bassist Reggie 'Fieldy' Arvizu finally unleashes his solo bass album after a decade of expectations. Joel McIver gives *Bassically* a spin

FIELD THEORY

Pic by Sebastien Paquet

I've interviewed hundreds of bass players for this magazine, and they tend to fall into three distinct categories, although I should stress that what unites 99 percent of them is that they're decent people. The first lot are gearheads; obsessed with tone and branding, they live for new product announcements and will spend days in search of the perfect frequencies.

The next set of bassists are the opposite; they're not really bothered about bass guitars and amps, but they're technique freaks, practising double thumbing and tapping at all times and checking out Youtube to see if anyone else is out-shredding them – a futile exercise, as no matter who you are, there's always someone better than you.

Then there's the third category; bass players who don't want to play like Victor Wooten and who also couldn't give a hoot about gear, wanting only to make a living without having to worry about the instrument that enables them to do it, as long as the bass parts aren't too tricky. Korn bassist Fieldy is one of these, and even though he has a solo album out called *Bassically* (and there we were, thinking that our ace 'Bassically Speaking' section title was original) which features loads of twiddly lines, he doesn't waste time worrying about bass. Talking to him is really quite refreshing.

"It's been a long journey, man – it's been nine or 10 years," he chuckles, asked how long he's been working on *Bassically*. "I don't know too many artists that do it. It's a lot of work. It was myself and my buddy. He would come on tour with me for the last nine years and on downtime we would work together. He would do all the producing and making the weird sounds, while I did all the basses."

He adds: "We'd come up with some groove ideas, and then he would add some sounds to it, or sometimes he would come up with some drum beat ideas to get the songs started. We'd just build on it once a foundation was rolling. We'd add stuff as we heard it. I'd add rhythm basses and lead basses and replace everything with a bunch of basses. Like I say, a lot of work!"

The album is not, for anyone familiar with Korn's dark, downtuned metal sound, anything like Fieldy's day-job band. It's funky, upbeat and mildly psychedelic in parts, based on liquid, busy bass parts which don't adhere to his usual clicky slap and fingerstyle.

"It's totally opposite to Korn," he asserts. "That's what I was going for; I wanted to go off on a style that was everything from funk, blues, Latin, reggae, fusion, R&B, trippy music... all kinds of stuff. It's a musical journey. It was difficult to pull all that off. I had a lot of layering of rhythm tracks and lead tracks and percussion tracks, just to fill it up, because it's only bass.

"It was nice; almost like an outlet for me," he continues. "It took me away, and made me make music by myself, and then ask myself if I actually liked making music on my own; it took that to realise that the answer was yes. That's what I like to do, it's my hobby, making music – but it was very challenging to go out on my own and do something like this."

Fieldy has been a stalwart Ibanez player since the 1990s, although – as I said above – you won't hear him going into detail about the instrument spec any time soon. "Quite a few of the songs were done with my regular Ibanez five-strings, but I used some other basses too," he says. Asked to elaborate, he's a bit vague. "There was a P-Funk bass, some fretless basses... nothing major, just a couple of different basses, although I did mess around with a lot of different sounds and pedals."

He also has a custom 15-string Ibanez, the K-15, with its strings divided into five three-string courses – although when I ask him about which tuning he uses for it, he appears to be unsure. Again, you've got to admire the fact that he apparently has bigger things on his mind, which you and I also would if our band had sold 35 million albums.

"I don't really remember who tuned it," he says, apropos of nothing. "All I know is that when I picked it up, it sounded good, so I didn't really mess with it. When I'm playing one string it sounds like a big chord, it's crazy. It's not the best live bass, but it sounds amazing recorded."

The K-15 has to be a pick instrument, we assume. "No, still fingerstyle, but playing it was hard because it has such a big neck," he explains. "It's massive on that thing, and the strings were making weird slice marks in my fingers. The next day I was in some pain!"

Let's talk pedals, then. What was in the signal chain? "I found this one pedal I liked a lot – a Bootsy Collins pedal," he recalls. "It's massive, the size of a car tyre! It's funky-sounding – really cool. I tried to stay away from fuzz and distortion, though, because that would get confusing; I wanted people to know this album is all bass and not guitar. I messed around with so many different pedals I can't even name them all – you name it, I probably used it.

"I like digital pedals where you can have, like, 1000 pedals on one board," he adds. "Especially when it comes to bass; for me, it's all about the player and the notes. I'm not that far out there with crazy sounds, so it's not that important."

We remind Fieldy that every time he's in *BGM*, some bright spark pops up on our Facebook page, complaining about a comment he once made to the effect of 'It doesn't matter what notes you fret with your left hand'. Again, he answers a different question, but we don't mind.

"Yeah. Kind of," he says. "That's probably why I'm an awkward bass player, because I'm left-handed but I was forced to play right-handed, so I'm a little off."

He certainly has a unique style, we observe.

"You know what it is? I can only say it's awkward," he muses. "That's why my timing's kinda weird, and my playing's kinda weird, because I had to recreate a style of playing, my hands weren't natural at playing."

Can he play left-handed bass, then? "Not really. I can't play right-handed bass either! Ha ha!"

The man's a legend. Do look into getting his solo album; in today's doomed music industry, the fact that a bassist has got a solo bass album recorded and released is nothing short of miraculous – and if we, the bass community, don't support it, who will?

Bassically **is out now on Pledgemusic.**
Info: www.pledgemusic.com/projects/fieldy

DEEP THOUGHT

Satyricon bassist Anders Odden on the low tones behind the Norwegian experimentalists' new album, *Deep Calleth Upon Deep*

I built my first bass when I was nine years old. It had one string, made of rubber, attached to a stick on a bucket. My first real electric bass was some sort of Fender copy. I used to live on a farm and all my early bands used to rehearse in an abandoned house there. Since then I've played bass on various projects, mostly in the studio. Since 2013, I have been the live bass player for the Norwegian black metal band Satyricon. I borrowed a few basses for it, but never found the perfect, big, clear, gritty tone combination that can work in any kind of metal, punk or rock songs. When I was invited to take part in the recording of the new record, *Deep Calleth Upon Deep*, I ended up using different basses from Ibanez and ESP, but realised it was time for me to step up the game and find a bass that fit my playing style and that was 'mine'.

I looked at many different basses for a while, but when I checked out the basses from Warwick I came to realise how much the right kind of wood makes the tone bigger and better. I took a long shot and sent them an email, explaining that I was going to play bass on the next Satyricon world tour, and was invited to come down to their factory in Germany soon after. From there it just went really quickly to where I am today, with my own custom-built bass and a few others as backup for the tour. The bass they built for me is the best instrument I have ever played and owned. It's a Streamer four-string with a maple neck, alder body and EMG pickups. My biggest hero on bass is Lemmy. His percussive rhythm guitar style of playing is unique and gave Motörhead its distinct sound. In my own projects, I like to use a little distortion to give the bass a more gritty, ugly sound that kind of reminds a little of what Lemmy had. It's how I like to hear bass. Another hero is of course, Cliff Burton. I was fortunate enough to see his second to last performance in Oslo on September 26, 1986. He made a huge impression on me. He was like the Jimi Hendrix of the thrash metal generation, the way he changed music and passed away early. His powerful pumping style, sense of melody and pure technical skills made Metallica decide to move to where he lived to continue their path to greatness. That says enough, doesn't it?

> "I LIKE TO USE A LITTLE DISTORTION TO GIVE THE BASS A MORE GRITTY, UGLY SOUND"

I also enjoy the bass playing of Duff McKagan. The fact that he is a rhythm guitarist and plays with a pick makes his style more like my own. I think he was the glue between egos in his band as I have sometimes been in mine. I guess I admire him as a musician and a band guy that happens to play bass in his most successful band, even though he is a guitarist with his own projects too.

We are currently on the road in Europe on the first leg of this tour. The many sold-out shows so far on this run tells me we are doing something right. I'm very happy to be out here with my new Warwick basses. They have given me a whole new feel for what I do. I will never play another bass brand again.

Info: www.satyricon.no

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ENGINEERED TO

Brit amp-makers Ashdown Engineering enter their third decade in business this year. We gave Kev Sanders a birthday cake and sent him down to Ashdown HQ to hear the company's dramatic story from founder Mark Gooday

Turning off a quiet residential street in Heybridge, Essex into the small industrial estate that's home to Ashdown Engineering, there's little evidence that I've arrived at the spiritual home of the British bass amp industry. The two newer units to my right house a gym and an insurance office, but it's the old white-painted brick buildings ahead that I've come for.

"It used to be an old fruit maltings," says Dan Gooday, second-in-command at Ashdown, as he comes out to meet me. "The buildings to the side of us house a workshop for building prototypes. We can do all the woodwork and paintwork here, although for production those aspects are outsourced to a local company that we've used from the very beginning. The rest of the space is for packaging, spares and components, as well as a room full of stock ready to be shipped to our distributors and stockists."

We walk into the building ahead and into the main assembly areas. For a company that has become such a familiar part of the live music industry, it's smaller than I expected, with a small team of technicians building amps and a separate bench area dedicated to repairs and service. The whole space has an atmosphere of homely, businesslike calm, although the stacked component bins, steel pressings and piles of paperwork indicate that this is also a focused working space. Dan shows me upstairs to the offices, where I'm greeted by company founder Mark Gooday.

After an initial chat about our shared passion for old British sports cars, I begin by asking Mark how it all started. "I moved down from Birmingham to Essex as a lad," he tells me. "I'd always been interested in building and modifying cabinets and amps for the bands I was in, and as well as playing bass I was working as a DJ at some of the local holiday camps."

At this point Mark was still in his early twenties; his main job was managing a small metalwork and fabrication business. One of the companies that his firm worked with was Trace Elliot, who were based at that time at a shop in Romford called Soundwave; Mark bought one of their 4x10 combos to gig with.

With his talent for electronics, and the experience he'd gained in management and engineering at the metalwork factory, Mark took a keen interest in Trace Elliot and informed them that he could produce their amps to a higher quality while saving them money on the manufacturing process. They had the good sense to listen – and shortly afterwards, they asked Mark if he would join the company.

"They initially offered me a wage of 30 or 40 percent less than I was already earning – and a beige Ford Cortina estate!" says Mark. I can tell by the disdain in his voice that, for a self-confessed petrolhead, the company car was the bigger insult. "That wasn't going to work for me, but we sat down and thrashed out a deal whereby I'd keep the meagre salary and car, but I'd also take a percentage based on the savings that I made for them." Within the first six months that figure was so high that

TO PERFECTION

Trace couldn't afford to pay him, so somewhat reluctantly they gave him 24 percent of the entire business. It was a smart move.

Mark grew Trace Elliot rapidly, but company boss and founder Fred Friedlein became increasingly uneasy about the inherent risk involved in a business of this size, and in 1992 Trace was sold to American company Kaman. Mark continued to head up the business, increasing sales, turnover and visibility to a point where Trace had 200 employees and an annual turnover of over £8 million.

"I took on a building just across the road from here," he says, glancing out of his office window at a huge, 250,000 square-feet factory unit, clearly visible across the estate. "We invested in everything needed for the centralised manufacture and European distribution of the new Trace amps and cabs."

The business was doing well – but then Kaman ran into financial problems with their American financiers, and just before Christmas '97 Trace Elliot was sold off. The task of laying off over 100 UK staff fell to Mark. Many of them were personal friends, and it's something, he says, that will always haunt him.

He continues: "Feeling desolate, and seeing no future for Trace Elliot, I tendered my resignation, but Bill Kaman persuaded me to stay on. And then, shortly after that..." Mark looks out of the office window toward the old Trace Elliot factory, pausing to choose his words carefully, "...I was told I was out."

With no job, a young family and a house in negative equity, Mark needed a plan. "After the collapse of the company and an out-of-court settlement with Kaman, I had a bit of money, but I was unemployable and unlike before, the banks wouldn't touch me. So I decided to build my own amps – something I'd planned to do for years anyway."

Mark named his new venture 'Ashdown' – his wife Jane's maiden name – and got to work on his initial designs. "Me and Clive Button – who'd been one of the designers at Trace Elliot – sketched out some ideas. Clive had designed the Trace amps to be bright and articulate, which was the sound that everyone wanted back then, but I wanted to create something that was somewhere between the vintage growl of an Ampeg SVT and the punchy brightness of the SWR amps of the time.

"We used the Stuart Watson-designed output toroidal transformers from the Trace amps, because they were virtually indestructible and added the sub-harmonic generator so that we had something to differentiate our amps from everyone else's," he adds. "Among others, I'd talked to Lee Sklar, and on his advice I wanted to keep the EQ as simple as possible – in fact our earliest designs had just three tone controls. Customers wanted more, though, so we added the two graphic sliders between the existing Bass, Middle and Treble controls and that's how the Ashdown EQ came about."

Image was important from the start. The spooky green glow from the ultraviolet light on the Trace amps could be spotted across a dark stage, and Mark wanted to make his amps just as visible. "I'd seen a backlit VU meter on an old piece of studio kit and thought, that's what I need!", he says. He also wanted to include styling cues from old

> "I WANTED TO KEEP THE EQ AS SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE — OUR EARLIEST DESIGNS HAD JUST THREE TONE CONTROLS"

The ABM-810

From top: the ABM 1200, the BTA 400, and the RM-EVO-500HR

British sports cars, and in the fascinating file of early sketches and designs which he shows me, there is an old colour sample for 1960s Austin Healey sports cars in 'ice metallic blue'. This was the colour used for those first Ashdown amps.

Mark continues, "Clive Button also liked the name 'Klystron magnifier', which was a type of valve used in wartime radar equipment and which he also thought sounded cool, retro and sci-fi. It's something that Flash Gordon might say – 'Turn up the Klystron Bass Magnifier, Doctor Zarkov!' When Clive and I were both happy with the design, I made several prototypes at home in the living room."

This was the beginning of the Ashdown brand as we know it, and that first design was the Ashdown ABM Klystron Bass Magnifier. "A big break for us early on was Mark King, who – because I'd known him from my time at Trace Elliot – was on board with our amps from the start," he says. "Fortunately, those first Ashdown amps came at just the time he was changing his sound, moving away from the bright slap tone he'd had up till then. I have to thank him for giving our company such a foot-up so early on."

John Entwistle was another early enthusiast, although his first experience with Ashdown didn't go quite as well as Mark would have liked. "I took him one of the first amps I'd made at home behind my sofa. I finished it at 2am and took it over to John's place first thing the next morning. John didn't get up until the afternoon, so I stood around the house feeling nervous and excited for hours until he eventually came down. He plugged it in, and bang! I'd been so tired that I'd wired it for 110 volts instead of 250!" Mark went back and built another amp that afternoon, returning the same day; this time not only did it work, but Entwistle loved it, the powerful growling sound perfectly suiting his sound and style.

Ashdown were now off and running, but that didn't mean that life was easy. "The guys at the Bass Centre in Wapping were a huge help to us early on, promoting the Ashdown name and giving us feedback," recalls Mark. "I'd given them my collection of basses to sell, to help raise money for the business, because the banks still wouldn't lend us money. Then I sent Kanda Shokai [previously Fender Japan] a sketch of what we were making, and by return they sent me a letter of credit for £20,000 to help get the company started."

This helped Mark and the team set up production of the amps they wanted to make – great sounding, good looking and reliable. That last quality is particularly important to Ashdown. As Mark explains, "In 50 years' time, all the amps we make here should still be going strong. Every ABM and valve amp we build is designed to be repaired. Every component can be replaced if it fails – and we can do that work here. Reliability is what sells our amps to professional bassists."

Soon Ashdown had grown to be a recognised and respected brand. Big names were using the amps and cabs; they'd taken on designer and valve guru Dave Green ("One of the most intelligent people I know," says Mark); and a distribution network had been set up.

One of the company's longest-running and most successful ranges is the MAG series, which still sells well in Europe, particularly in Germany, where it's marketed as 'Toneman' and built exclusively for the mega-retailers Thomann. "Hans Thomann deserves all the success in the world," says Mark. At a lower price point, the Rootmaster range is manufactured in China, allowing Ashdown to remain competitive in both quality and value.

Export is obviously an important part of the business. Is Mark worried about the effects of Brexit? "Not at all," he says. "Business is business. We always used to have borders, import duties and restrictions.

"I HAVE TO THANK MARK KING FOR GIVING OUR COMPANY SUCH A FOOT-UP SO EARLY ON"

...and the RM-EVO-C115T-500HR

If you have a good product that's in demand, people will pay for it wherever they are. It'll be no different. The drop in the value of sterling should have meant we sold more abroad from here, but actually sales have stayed pretty level. Added to that, buying and selling to China is all in US dollars anyway."

He continues: "We try hard to make as much as we can in the UK, but several years ago – in an effort to crack the US market, where we've always struggled to gain a foothold – we set up speaker cabinet manufacturing in Kentucky. Ironically, the Americans seemed to think that the UK-made products had more cachet, so that's still an issue for us – and in the future I'd like to have an American distributor."

And what else would he like for the future of Ashdown, I ask? "At the moment the company is small, lean and very efficient," says Mark. "That's an advantage we have over some of the bigger companies. I love to innovate, and always will, but that process carries with it huge costs in terms of research and development. With the popularity of in-ear monitoring, we might look at powered monitors to use with the likes of Kemper or Line 6 preamps – we'll see."

Ashdown has a stellar list of endorsees; what's their policy there? "We don't give away gear or pay for endorsees," he explains. "Guys like Paul McCartney, Nate Mendel and countless others use Ashdown gear because they love it, although of course we'll always support them as best we can. Two of our recent new products have got us really excited – the Norman Watt-Roy gold anodised preamp and DI pedal, and the Geezer Butler 'Head Of Doom', which has two VU meters – one each for input and output, plus lots of extra routing options on the back. It looks so cool!"

Ashdown is a close-knit family business: Mark's wife Jane, their son Dan and their son-in-law Lee all work for the company. Over the last 20 years they've had their ups and downs for various reasons, but this most British of companies seems well placed to forge ahead, innovating and building great amps until the time comes for Mark to relax and Dan to take over. Many congratulations on 20 years well spent!

www.ashdownmusic.com

BITE THE BULLET

Atlanta hellraisers Biters kick the myth of the demise of rock'n'roll into touch. Hywel Davies talks to bassist Philip Anthony about their new album and the late, great Lemmy Kilmister

Formed in 2009, Biters – Tuk Smith, guitar and vocals, Matt Gabs, guitar, Philip Anthony, bass, and Joey O'Brien, drums – have escorted the classic rock formula into the 21st century without clinging on to clichés. The foursome are more than aware of their position in that world, and despite the best efforts of a few keyboard warriors, Anthony takes a very strong stance on the band's sound.

"You can go on our Youtube page and there'll be a lot of comments that say, 'Thin Lizzy want their song back,' and 'Oh my God, Phil Lynott is rolling in his grave'," he tells *BGM*. "I'm like, time out, time out! How many bands are out there right now that sound exactly the same and sound like shit? We wear our influences on our sleeve and we want to write rock'n'roll songs. We haven't ripped anyone off. No-one's been beating down our door and suing us. What's wrong with sounding like a band that's amazing?"

We don't doubt that Anthony could happily flood these pages with a list of influential bass players, but when we bring up the subject, one name stands above all others. "Lemmy! He's my biggest inspiration. I like a very tough bass tone. Not as tough as his, but I like to think of my style as something close to being like Ramones meets Motörhead. They're two of my favourite bands in terms of style, tone, attitude, everything. When it comes to my favourite bands to listen to, no-one comes close to Thin Lizzy. Phil Lynott was a much cleaner player than Dee Dee Ramone or Lemmy, but I don't really look to play like him; they're two very different styles. I aspire to sound and play more like Lemmy because I like that dirtier style."

Biters' latest ear-belter *The Future Ain't What It Used To Be* is brimming with riff-laden bangers – but there's more than a few mellow moments in the mix too. "One of our new songs is called 'Going Back To Georgia'," he continues. "It's a slower, cuter, acoustic number and I'll play with my thumb and pick it out through the song. It's been really cool to play different styles. I get to take a step back and delicately play this song, which feels awesome and helps me focus on the harmonies that I sing."

He adds: "People always think 'Oh, four strings, that's easy'. No fuckin' way, dude! Here's the most important thing about playing bass: you and the drummer are the spinal cord of the band. You need to be locked in with the drummer. If you're not, you sound like shit. It sounds floppy and loose. So, having a solid drummer is critical. Our drummer is the only thing I can hear in my monitor. I can feel that kick and snare beat in my chest – it's great. That's the coolest thing about playing bass, man; locking in with the drummer!"

The Future Ain't What It Used To Be **is out now via Earache. Info: http://biters.earache.com.**

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MYSTERY MAN

Chris Childs of Thunder gives us a preview of his signature Sandberg Enigma bass

Veteran Brit-rockers Thunder are currently on a late-career roll, with their second new album in as many years, *Rip It Up*, receiving glowing reviews. What better way to toast that success than by designing your own signature instrument?

The band's bassist of 20 years, Chris Childs knows more than a thing or two about how basses are made, as we found out. He's named his work-in-progress instrument the Enigma – possibly a tongue-in-cheek nod to the fact that he's been unable to answer many questions about it up until now. *BGM* accompanied Childs and legendary bassmaker Holger Stonjek around Sandberg's factory in Braunschweig, Germany to check in with production and pick some brains…

Where did you first get the idea for doing a Sandberg bass, Chris?
I've been an endorsee of Sandberg for a couple of years so it was the next logical step. I've got three of them – and they're the best I've ever played. I particularly like the paint job on the Sandberg Forty Eight bass, which is quite distinctive in appearance. I thought it might look good on another bass, so I got to work in Photoshop, sent a design to Holger and suggested it as a signature bass. He sent me the prototype and I tried it at festivals over the summer.

What was your first Sandberg?
It was a Hardcore Aged California TM, which Alan Greensall from Synergy Distribution, who is Sandberg's UK distributor, had at his warehouse. I tried it out and was knocked out by it – but I had to wait for it to do the rounds of all the magazine reviewers first! I finally got it, and while I was over there, I was shown an image of the Forty Eight. Again, I fell in love, so next thing, I was ordering one of those. They were the first two.

What do you envisage using it for?
I will certainly use it for all Thunder's gigs. In the studio it's whatever works best; I won't necessarily confine myself to using Sandberg. I also have a Gretsch Electromatic which sounds great on some tracks. The next thing I'm going to do is put a fretless neck on the California TM that I have, so that I have a fretless Sandberg five-string.

What's on your checklist when you're out shopping for bass gear?
Playability. The very first time I picked up a Sandberg bass, in Guitar Guitar in Glasgow, it just didn't feel like a new bass. The build quality and finish is exceptional. It's like you've been playing it for a few years. And then there's the evenness of the notes. On most guitars there's a deadness on the G string, on D flat. And of course the action, how it's been set up. Those are the main things.

What was your very first bass?
I have no idea what make it was, but I immediately changed the shape of it to match the shape of a Rickenbacker, because I'd always wanted one of those. Next, again no idea of the brand, but a Jazz type bass. I've still got that. Then I had a couple of Status basses during the 90s, when everyone had one; a five-string and a fretless. Unfortunately, bills had to be paid and they got sold. I'm slightly irked about that.

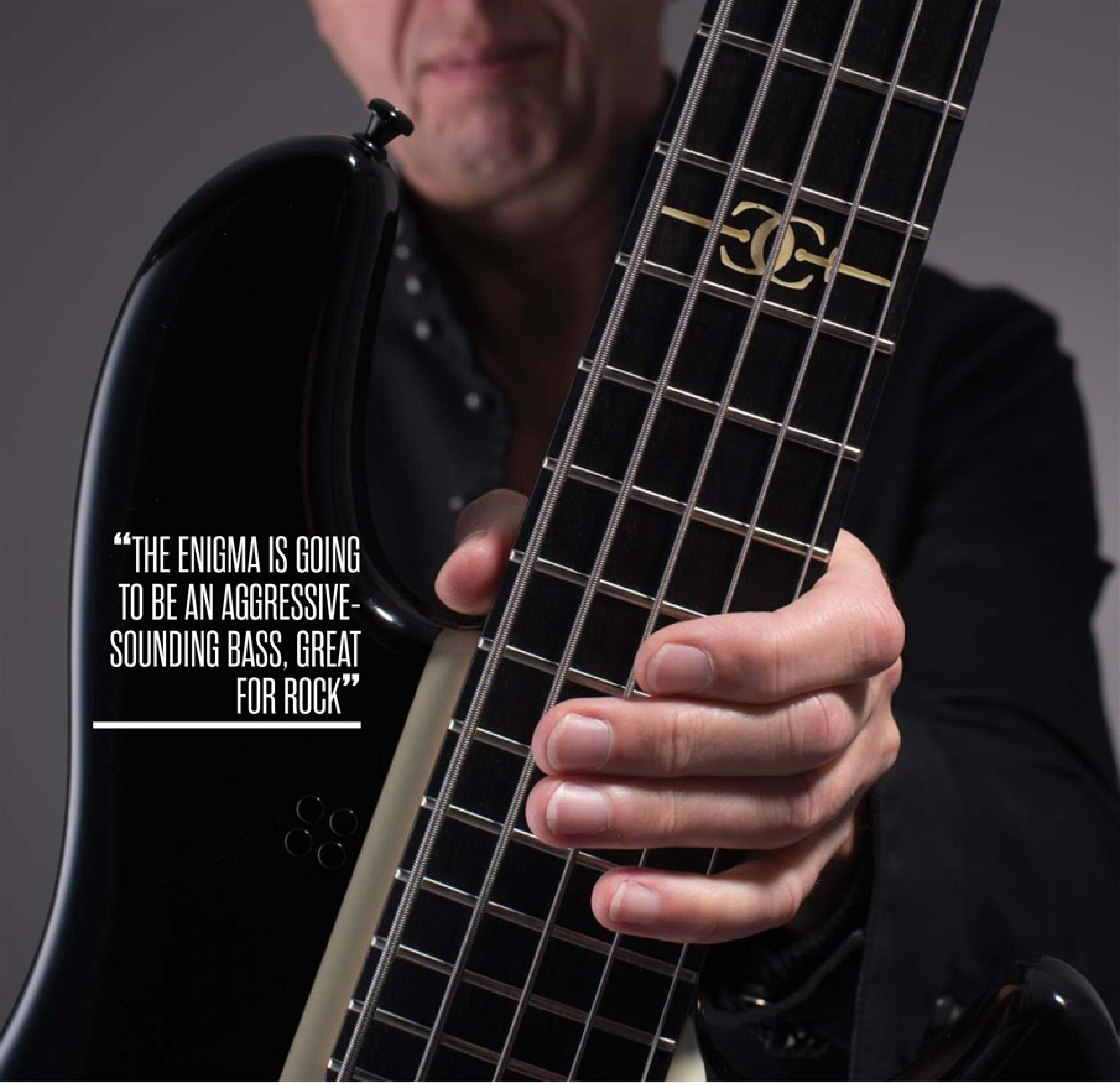
How often do you play five-strings?
All the time. We went through a stage of not using them at all, but a couple of years back Luke [Morley, Thunder guitarist] started writing songs in drop D so I used a four-string with a detuner, as that was an easier way of playing a lot of the riffs. But on the last couple of albums the songs have been in slightly different tunings.

How have your requirements changed from album to album?
Five-string is probably the biggest development for me in recent years. You'll never get me playing six-string. I've got no need for it. I'm quite a traditionalist.

What about fanned frets?
I played one at a friend's house and they felt very alien to me, to be honest, very odd. They're extremely easy to play, although you need really long arms.

What amps do you tend to pair your Sandbergs with?
I've got an endorsement deal with Fender, so I use a Bassman 800 head. Having used lots of different rigs over the years, I've concluded that I don't particularly love the sound of valve amps, although most bassists love them. I prefer the sound of a valve preamp with a solid-state or class D power amp. The sound works for me. In the studio I'll use a Fender 4x10 Neo cab and then whatever amp works. I've recently bought a 1964 Selmer Treble 'N' Bass 50, which goes against everything I just said, but I used it on an album and it sounded fantastic. It's almost as old as I am. I never use it on the road, though, as it's too fragile.

What about effects?
I never seem to use effects. About the only things I have are an octave pedal, a chorus pedal and a Big Muff Pi distortion, but generally it's guitar, lead, amp for me. Shorter signal path.



"THE ENIGMA IS GOING TO BE AN AGGRESSIVE-SOUNDING BASS, GREAT FOR ROCK"

Going back to band stuff, you've said you don't understand why other bands have spats, such is the unity of Thunder. What's the secret?
Within Thunder everyone knows their role. There's a certain hierarchy. Danny, the singer, is also the manager. Luke the guitarist is also the songwriter and musical director. I do a lot of the artwork and mixing. Benny is the engineer. Harry plays drums – but he's also a great character and so important in the band. A bass player's role is as a silent, stabilising influence I would say. There's a lot of bass players who run the show. It all depends on the dynamic within the band.

What can we expect from the next album?
I can't tell you, top secret! No, it'll be a departure from the last two albums, but it's still being developed. We're going to Rockfield Studios and what comes out will influence how the next ones are made. It's going to be slightly different and very interesting.

To sum up, how would you describe the Enigma bass?
The Enigma is going to look incredibly sexy and very visually appealing. It's going to be striking but acceptable – it will appeal to a lot of people. The playability? Well that goes without saying on a Sandberg. It'll have everything a Sandberg has. As far as sound goes, the pickup configuration is a top secret formula. It will have a great tonal palette because of that configuration. It's an aggressive-sounding bass, great for rock but very playable.

What else is next for you?
I've just done an album with Simon Kirke, the drummer from Bad Company, which, again is top secret. It's quite an achievement, actually, as I've always been a huge Free and Bad Company fan. It was a pleasure to work with him – we smashed through 12 tracks of bass and drums in two days, which is good going. A thoroughly nice man, and a great drummer. As my friend Don Airey said to me once, 'With some people, we all know they're great, but are they good?' and Simon is very, very good. That'll be out in the next year or so. As for Thunder, we have no intention of giving up. It's going to be flat out until one of us falls over.

Best job in the world?
Absolutely.

The Sandberg Chris Childs Enigma will go on sale in early 2018. Info: www.sandberg-guitars.de; www.synergydistribution.co.uk

GEAR REVIEWS

Behold our world-beating bass gear review section, where we bring you the crop of each month's new, interesting or otherwise relevant bass guitars, bass amplifiers, bass speakers and bass effects. Occasionally we'll review a guitar effect if it's particularly useful for bassists, and we'll test recording equipment and general accessories every now and then as well, but generally speaking, this zone is for bass-specific gear.

We take the ratings that we give each item very seriously. *BGM* is the only print magazine devoted to bass in this country, and we have readers from all over the world, so we're responsible about our conclusions. If a product is worth your investigation, we'll say so; if it's flawed in some way, we won't hold back from making that clear. We're not beholden to advertisers in any way and our conclusions are entirely independent of the views of manufacturers, musicians and distributors.

When you read about a bass-related product here, you know you're getting a sensible, balanced review from an experienced bass tester. Value for money is at the top of our agenda in these cash-strapped times, but on the other hand, we believe in paying for quality.

Right, that's enough from me. Remember, this is just about the only place that it's good to have GAS!*

Joel McIver, editor

*GAS = Gear Acquisition Syndrome (a malaise often suffered by bass players)

SANDBERG Chris Childs Signature Enigma

FENDER American Professional Jazz

ANACONDA Ultra J6E Elite

STONEFIELD M-Series Model 1-6S

SONIC FARM Tantra head, MAS Bodai 110 cab

ASHDOWN SZ Funk Face Twin Dynamic Filter

SANDBERG
Chris Childs Signature Enigma

Thunder bassist Chris Childs has his own signature bass ready to hit the shelves. Mike Brooks runs the rule over the Enigma to see if its statistics add up

Synergy Distribution
www.synergydistribution.co.uk

£2150

As you've read elsewhere in this magazine, Thunder bassist Chris Childs teamed up with German luthiers Sandberg several years ago and was so impressed that a signature bass with them was an obvious step. A player with a keen understanding of tone and how it works in a given musical setting, Chris took the standard California model template, made some design changes here and there and set about creating his dream instrument. After months of fine tuning, we have the Enigma. Available in four and five-string formats, the resulting instrument looks lean, clean, sleek and well laid out. But does it deliver the killer punch?

Build Quality

The curvaceous body styling feels comfortable to wear and nicely 'familiar', while the contouring and cutaways make the bass a near-perfect fit and pleasingly accessible. Looks-wise, simplicity is the key word; the alder body has been finished in a black high-gloss lacquer, while the racing stripes from the Sandberg Forty Eight model have been incorporated in cream. The results are very effective, giving the bass a classy look that extends up to the matching headstock.

The hard rock maple neck comes with a satin finish and is made even more playable due to the shallow D-shaped profile; this benefits a five-string neck with 19mm string spacing and a 44mm nut width. The setup and overall standard of finishing is exemplary; at times, it can feel as though you're playing a four-string instrument, it's so accommodating. The six-bolt attachment is tight

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £2150
Made In | Germany
Colour | Black, high gloss lacquer
Body | Alder
Neck | Hard rock maple, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt-on, six-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 44mm
Fingerboard | Ebony
Frets | 22
Pickups | 1 x Sandberg humbucking pickup, 1 x Sandberg split-coil pickup
Electronics | Active, 2-band EQ, 9-volt
Controls | Volume, pickup pan, treble, bass
Hardware | Black, Sandberg lightweight elephant-ear machine heads, Sandberg top-loading bridge
Weight | 4 kg
Case/gig bag included | Gigbag
Left-hand option available | Yes, as custom order

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Classy looks matched with impressive five-string tones
Minus | Some players might want a few more bells and whistles for their bucks
Overall | A great all-round bass that does everything well and to a high standard

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

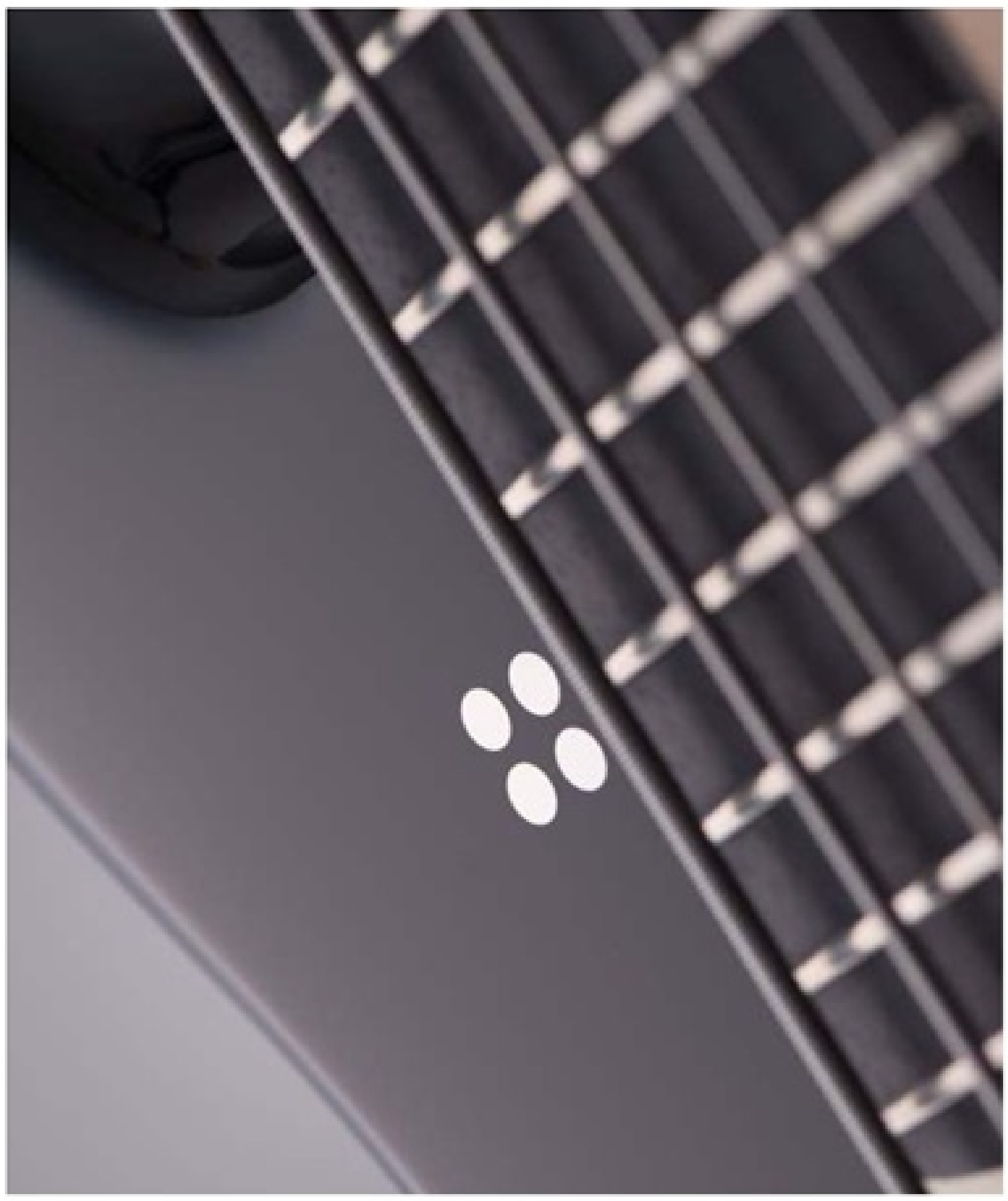
and solid with no visible gaps around the neck pocket. There are no sharp fret ends and although there are no front position markers on the richly coloured ebony fingerboard, white side dots are present. A signature model needs some unique touches, of course, and the Enigma features Chris's signature on the rear of the headstock and a custom Enigma inlay marker incorporating his initials at the 12th fret.

The lightweight Sandberg machine heads are very secure and feel substantial in operation, as do the four controls (volume, pickup pan, treble and bass) which are sensibly laid out for easy access. The top-loading Sandberg bridge is functional and does what it needs to do with a minimum of fuss.

Sounds And Playability

The bass balances very well when placed on a strap and instantly, the player is drawn to the natural tonal character of this bass. Holding the Enigma against you, the notes ring out fully and sustain impressively, indicating a fine natural tone with good resonance. The ebony board also plays a part in the instrument's organic tone, and the promising acoustic sound is reinforced with a highly impressive sonic performance when we plug in.

First impressions are very good; it becomes apparent, having played the bass for some time, that this is an instrument for all musical styles. Don't assume that because Chris's main bands are Thunder and Tyketto that this is an out-and-out rock bass; sure, it does the rock thing very well, but throwing different musical styles and techniques at the Enigma showed how flexible an instrument this really is. With a flat EQ, the response is solid and authoritative, with plenty of warmth and definition and a good string-to-string volume. Panning between the two pickups, the neck-based split-coil has a rounded tone with a characteristic low-mid punch, while panning to the bridge positioned humbucker tightens up the tone and adds some powerful humbucking tones.



The EQ is well-voiced, featuring enough treble for improved clarity and definition, while the bass EQ adds additional strength to the low end when called upon. For the most part, boosting the EQ isn't required very often. The low B string benefits from a little extra push in both departments but on the whole, the low end responded impressively. The bass offers a smooth, throaty snap when required to do so, again the hardness of the ebony fingerboard giving the notes impact and standing out a little more than they would with, say, a rosewood board. The fingerstyle tones bounce and bubble along nicely, while the slap tones cut through very well with a solid punchy character.

Conclusion

Sleek, tasteful, minimalistic in places, and doing everything well with no fuss... much like its namesake! This is a fine instrument from the Sandberg stable and well worthy of its player. Chris obviously knew what he wanted here, and his opinions and requirements have been fulfilled. At £2150 for the five-string or £1999 for the four-string version, the Enigma is within reach of many budgets – so if you're looking for a new adventure, the Enigma may just light up your playing. Highly recommended.

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FENDER
American Professional Jazz

Remember when they changed the recipe for Coke and all hell broke loose? Well, this isn't like that... Kev Sanders tries the new AP Fender Jazz

Fender
www.fender.com

£1509

You have to give credit where it's due. For some years, in order to stay ahead of the competition, Fender has been executing a programme of tweaks and upgrades for their iconic US-made Jazz bass. Historically, some changes have been better received than others; the 'Posiflex' graphite neck inserts introduced over 10 years ago have virtually eliminated neck problems, whereas the first versions of the three-bolt 'micro-tilt' system of the late 70s were quite possibly the cause of a few! *[Allegedly, m'lud – Ed.]* But the last few years in particular have seen Fender's quality in all areas reach new heights – and the current US Fender Jazz gives little away to all those mega-dollar boutique instruments that benefit from the same body shape and layout.

Build Quality

Taking the new AP Jazz out of its high quality moulded case, the same as that of the US Elite series, everything is reassuringly familiar; the

body is Fender Jazz-shaped and the pale maple neck has Fender Jazz dimensions. It's the same, but different, because the new features which distinguish the AP from any previous versions are not immediately obvious.

Let's start with the most important new addition – the new V-Mod pickups. In keeping with tradition the circuitry is passive, so there are no batteries or active controls. This is the purest, quietest and some would say best way to change the tone of your bass, but it does mean that you can't boost frequencies like you can on an active bass, only cut them. This in turn means that the quality and frequency range of the pickups is crucial. The good news here is that the AP Jazz has a pair of newly designed pickups from Fender pickup whiz Michael Bump. Alnico 2 magnets are used for the bass frequencies, while

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £1509
Made in | USA
Body | Alder; ash version also available
Neck | Maple, 34" scale with Posiflex graphite reinforcement
Neck joint | Bolt on
Nut width | 38mm
Fingerboard | Maple; rosewood available
Frets | 20
Pickups | 2 x V-Mod single-coils
Electronics | Passive
Controls | Front pickup volume, back pickup volume, tone
Hardware | Fender Chrome 'Hi Mass' bridge and lightweight fluted tuners
Weight | 3.9kg
Case/gig bag included? | Elite hardshell
Left-hand option available? | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | New pickups and other minor tweaks keep the Jazz at the top of the class
Minus | Nothing. Really!
Overall | The Fender American Professional Jazz is the best 'US standard' version we've yet had

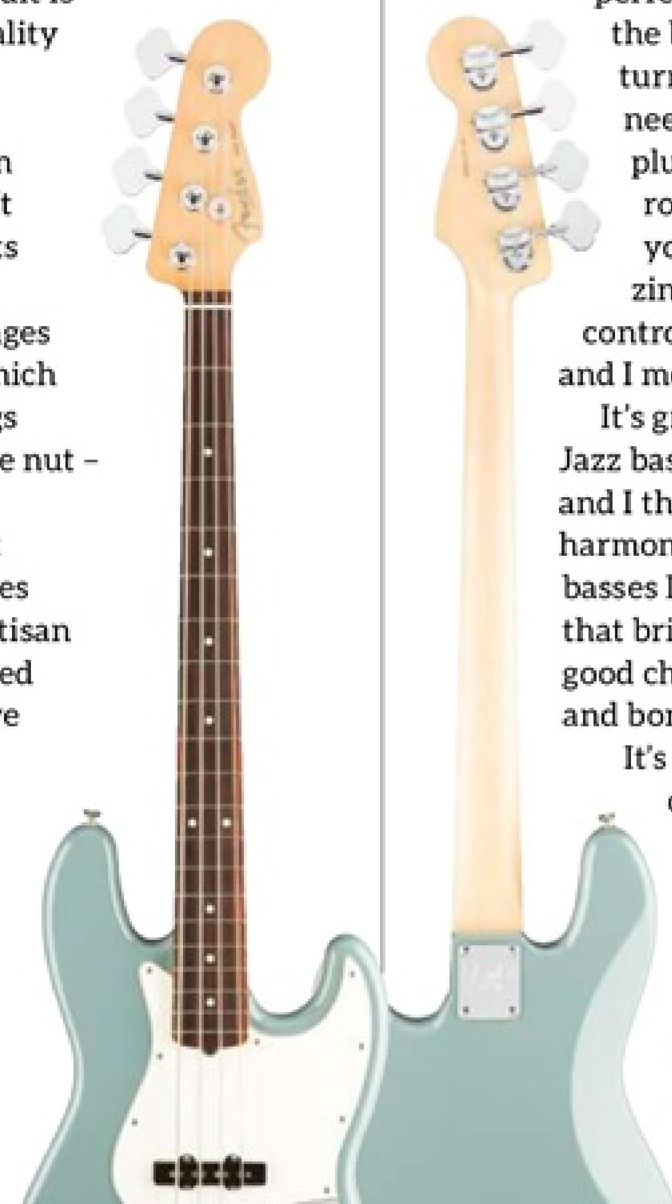
BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

Alnico 5s take care of the treble side. The result is a balanced, flat sound that really lets the quality of the timbers shine through.

The 'Narrow C' neck profile feels slimmer than ever, especially at the nut end. The satin finish is cool and oh-so smooth under the left hand and the new higher profile narrow frets and rolled fingerboard edges make it super-fast and almost effortless to play. Other changes include a 'Hi-Mass' bridge and the tuners, which now have tapered shafts that coax the strings downward and onto the perfectly fitted bone nut – that's a new development too.

Overall, it's almost impossible to find fault with the build quality. Standard Fender basses were never really created individually by artisan luthiers. Instruments are finished and checked by skilled hand and eye of course, but they've always been mass-produced by machine and industrial process. These days, quality control and manufacturing technology means tolerances are super-tight, finishes are flawless and electronics are quiet and reliable. The result is that the AP Jazz has a fit and finish that's easily as good as any Fender bass that has come before.



Sounds And Playability

With both pickup volumes and the tone control on full, the sound is bright, full and attacking. The tone control may be passive, but the range from off to fully on is wide and linear, and that makes it very usable. Just over halfway sounded perfect through my Bergantino and Markbass rig. With the bridge pickup maxed out and the neck pickup turned right down, a little less of the tone control was needed to quickly find that classic, tight bark when plucked hard back toward the bridge. Swapping round and backing off the bridge pickup gives you everything from mellow, soulful warmth to a zinging slap tone depending on how you set the tone control. It's quick, it's easy and boy does it sound good – and I mean really, really good.

It's great to see Fender has used alder for the AP Jazz bass bodies. Alder is a little less dense than ash, and I think it lends the bass a slightly more refined and harmonically rich tone than some of the ash-bodied Jazz basses I've played over the years. There's still plenty of that bright, attacking tone that makes the Jazz such a good choice for slappers, but here, with the alder body and bone nut you seem to get a more musical tone.

It's bright and contemporary, but infused with the complex richness of the best early-60s Fender basses, many of which, like this one, had alder bodies.

Conclusion

I have a feeling that the new AP Jazz has been designed as much for a new generation of players as for the legions of traditional, loyal customers. Part of the reason I say this, at least for this particular review bass, is the contemporary 'Sonic Grey' colour. But it's more than that. Jazz necks have always been slim and fast, but this one takes that to a whole new level; it can still get down and dirty of course, but it's also a soloist's dream. Well done, Fender.

GLENN HUGHES	BLACKBERRY SMOKE	deftones	FLEETWOOD MAC	Cheap Trick
GLENN HUGHES	RICHARD TURNER	SERGIO VEGA	JOHN MCVIE	TOM PETERSSON

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

RRP | £2900
Made In | UK
Body | Swamp ash core, 5A quilted maple top; clear gloss over black burst rose finish
Neck | Five-piece rock maple with two carbon-fibre rods
Neck Join | Bolt-on, six bolts
Fingerboard | Birdseye maple, 24 frets, handcut brass nut
Scale length | 34.5"
Pickups | 2 x Aguilar AG 6PJ-HC
Electronics | Glockenklang 3-band preamp
Controls | Volume (pull for passive), pickup blend, treble (passive tone in passive mode), bass; three-position mid centre selector switch (250Hz, 550Hz, 800Hz)
Hardware | Hipshot tuners and bridge
Weight | 4.5kg
Case/gigbag supplied? | Hiscox Liteflite case

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Superb build; state-of-the-art tones
Minus | Epic dimensions; less epic bassists may prefer a smaller/lighter choice
Overall | A breathtaking instrument that will supply a lifetime of bass tones

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

ANACONDA
Ultra J6E Elite

Anaconda's top-spec Ultra J comes with a suitably crushing pricetag. Does the end justify the means, asks Joel McIver

Anaconda Basses
www.anacondabasses.co.uk

£2900

London's Anaconda Basses have established an enviable track record in recent years, issuing instruments of phenomenal quality and asking a recession-defying RRP in return. We've been consistently impressed with luthier Andrew Taylor-Cummings' approach to design and execution and always jump at the chance to review his new creations. This six-string version of his Ultra J range looks almost indescribably tasty to us, as indeed it should for nearly three thousand quid of your taxed income – so let's plug, play and pontificate...

Build Quality

Pull the J6E out of the Hiscox case in which it is supplied and you quickly realise why bass pundits practically regard six-string basses as completely different instruments to your average fours and fives. At 4.5kg, it's relatively lightweight, but it doesn't lack presence. Twin carbon rods reinforce the neck, a slab of wood anchored to the body by no fewer than six offset bolts – offset, as Taylor-Cummings tells us, to solve the micromillimetrically tiny wobble problem that parallel rows inevitably produce.

Assuming you have big enough muscles, or at least sufficient body mass, to wield this instrument, you'll need hands to match. Of course, the string spacing and neck profile have been specifically designed to enable comfortable playing, but this is no John Myung-style, six-strings-on-a-five-string-neck deal. Solid Hipshot machine heads and a weighty bridge hold down the strings across a 34.5" scale length, a nice compromise (as we'll see) between the standard 34" which so many B-string lovers feel is too short and the 35" which makes the headstock look miles away. The 'Luminlay' side markers, chargable with the supplied LED torch, are luminescent but subtle; perfect if you don't want your bass to look like a midnight traffic jam on the M4.

"THE PRICE TAG WILL SEEM FAR MORE REASONABLE WHEN YOU'VE EXPERIENCED ITS PHYSICAL PRESENCE, NOT TO MENTION THE GLISTENING QUALITY OF THE COMPONENTS"

The body woods look unfeasibly beautiful, with a state-of-the-art slinky finish. You may or may not be generally keen on the concept of yellow-brown tiger stripes, which admittedly sound a bit Van Halen on paper; in the flesh (as it were) the colour scheme is both subtle and pleasing. Note that the outer edges of the body contours have been left a natural colour; there's no unnecessary showing-off here.

As always, when we review an expensive bass like this one, we make a point of examining the finer details. A sharp fret end here and there isn't the end of the world on a £199 Precision copy, but it is when you're paying as much for a bass as you would for 15 of said cheap instruments. We're happy to report that Anaconda have designed and built this instrument with the highest quality in mind, so there's a handmade wooden cavity cover (not a plastic one), an offset rear strap button (for better balance), high-quality control pots, and so on from the tuners to the tail.

Sounds And Playability

Direct your attention to the Ultra J's lower bout and there you'll find a series of pots which turn stiffly but smoothly – and when you've played as many cheap basses as we have, you'll enjoy the feeling of slight resistance as they turn. There's nothing worse than a lightweight tone control that feels as if it's going to fall off.

Select passive mode by pulling out the volume pot. We always do this first when testing active basses, as it reveals the instrument's 'normal' sound before any battery power is applied to the tone range. The Ultra J in passive mode is a wonderful instrument with a naturally full midrange and perfectly decent performance at top and bottom. The Treble pot functions as the passive tone, and if this was as far as this bass went, we'd still be reasonably impressed.

Of course, the preamp is there for a reason, so switch to active and you'll be rewarded with full bass and a crispy top end. A pickup blend adds flexibility, and a three-position mid centre selector allows you to 'move' the midrange up and down – a useful touch if you've ever needed to push your sound out of the mix sufficiently to be heard.

In terms of how well this bass plays, you need to commit to giving it due care and attention to maximise its performance. Some basses almost do your job for you, repaying the slightest touch; this isn't one of those. Play tight and hard and apply careful muting – Scott Devine recommends using the back of your fretting-hand thumb on a six-string, and we agree whole-heartedly – and the Ultra J kicks back at you with a meaty, thunderous but controlled bottom end.

There's a whole world of mids to explore, of course, and that top end is no slouch either, but we feel that this bass is most at home with staccato low end as per reggae, soul, R&B or plain old pop. The low B-string feels especially solid because of the extra half-inch on the scale, and you're more willing to incorporate it into your playing as a result, rather than treating it as an expensive thumb rest.

Conclusion

This is a big bass which requires dedication, so if you're looking for a slick play and an easily portable body, look elsewhere. However, if your bass-playing requires a heavy, powerful, high-performance instrument, this one absolutely has to be on your to-try list. Its price tag will seem far more reasonable when you've experienced its physical presence, not to mention the glistening quality of the components. Hats off yet again to Anaconda.

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STONEFIELD
M-Series Model 1-6S

A six-string bass in a slimline package with weight-saving elements? Mike Brooks's back breathes a sigh of relief...

Stonefield Musical Instrument Company
www.stonefieldmusic.com

£4495

The Stonefield story continues apace, with this particular example at the top end of the New Zealand-based luthiers' range; the M-Series Model 1-6S offers all of the refinements offered by Tomm Stanley and his team at Stonefield. Six-strings by their very nature can be a little unwieldy, to say the least, so to combat their daunting dimensions and weight factors, Stanley has utilised titanium hardware and truss rods to reduce the impact which metal components have on the instrument's weight. We've been impressed with the other Stonefield instruments we've seen, so how does this one fare?

Build Quality

The M1-6S is only available as a Slimline model with titanium hardware that takes around 220 grammes off the overall weight. Stanley's patented tuning system is an impressive unit and operates reassuringly well,

"THE FACT THAT THEY ARE SO DIFFERENT FROM MOST INSTRUMENTS IS ACTUALLY A PLUS FOR THE BRAND"

with smoothness and solidity. The bass is equipped with two truss rods, both made from titanium so as not to burden the bass with more weight than is required. The rounded bodyshape and deep cutaways offer good playability, although a little more contouring to the front and rear of the salusalu and Australian blackwood body might prove beneficial.

Finished in a smooth, non-sticky satin oil, the body's natural hues shine through, an effect that is enhanced by the through-neck

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £4495
Made In | New Zealand
Colour | Natural
Body | Salusalu with Australian blackwood
Neck | Maire and aircraft-grade 44-piece laminates; four-colour burst finish; 34" scale
Neck Joint | Full through-body, neck and core
Nut Width | 62mm
Fingerboard | Massa
Frets | 24
Pickups | OEM humbucker
Electronics | Passive
Controls | Volume, passive bass roll-off, passive treble roll-off, midrange setting (10 options with push/pull and bypass)
Hardware | Titanium Tomm Stanley™ Tuning System, black maire bridge titanium string posts
Weight | 4.2 kg
Case/gig bag included | Yes, lite-flite case with extra strings
Left-hand option available | Yes, custom order

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | A break from the norm and an interesting six-string in many respects
Minus | Very pricey
Overall | If six-string basses are your thing, this might just have the tones you've been looking for

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

construction that runs the length of the instrument. Stanley has used timbers indigenous to the region, with black maire deployed for the bridge piece and nut and incorporated into the 44-piece laminated neck core. The warm-coloured fingerboard is constructed using massa, and the fingerboard binding utilises Solomon Island ebony and black maire once again.

The four-colour burst finished neck has a full D-shaped profile, making it a bit of a handful, although this is offset by the 16mm string spacing and broad fingerboard dimensions. Some players may find the 62mm nut width a bit of a challenge at first, but be assured that this is a comfortable bass to play, despite some headstock bias, and the level of finishing is very high indeed.

Sounds And Playability

We've commented before on the impressive passive tones offered by the Stonefield product range, and this bass is no different in that respect. Its inherent woody character is clearly noticeable; plugging the bass in reinforces those characteristics.

Without an active EQ, you may wonder just how the increased note range may sound without the extra push that an active circuit can provide – but have no fear, the passive system developed by Stonefield is an interesting hybrid, designed to coax the maximum tone range from the instrument.

With controls for volume, bass roll-off, treble roll-off and the midrange setting selector, there are plenty of options available. Experimentation is the name of the game here, so working with the bass and treble controls is wise in order to get your starting point for a tone that works for you. From that point on, you have 10 midrange options open to you. The control itself has six positions – bypass followed by five tones – and to access the extra five midrange options you need to push or pull the low control.

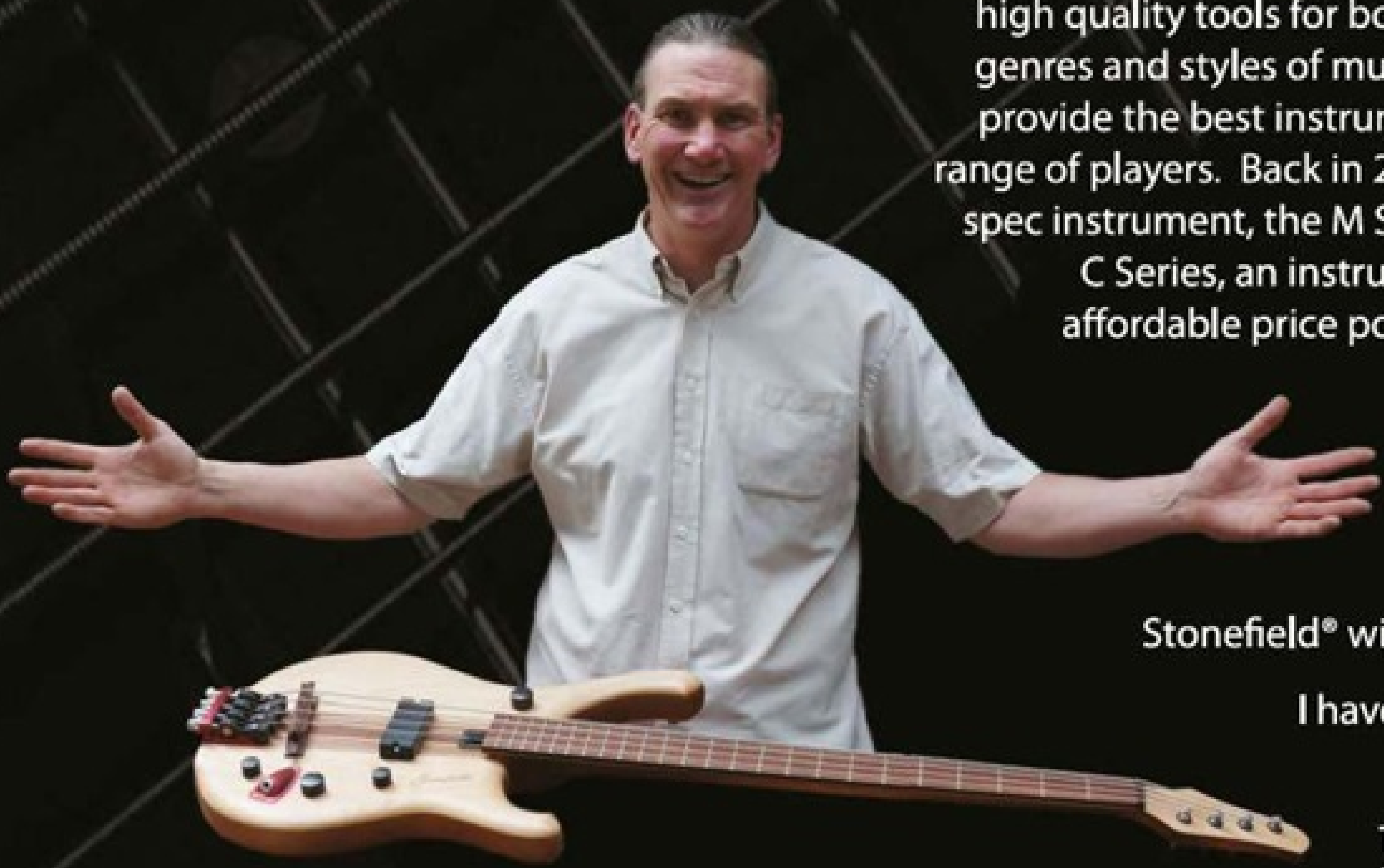
The mids are really where the tonal differences are at on this bass. As a six-string, you want a tone that utilises the low range of the low B string and the higher frequencies of the C string; the musical situation you find yourself in will dictate the mid-setting you need to tap into. Some knowledge and understanding of the different settings is imperative, but pick players will have as much to enjoy here as fingerstyle players, slap players and tappers.

Conclusion

The bass market is less set in its ways than the guitar market, so it's not surprising that Stonefield instruments have caught many an eye at the past two London Bass Guitar Shows, garnering some favourable comments in the process. The fact that they are so different from most instruments is actually a plus for the brand. As a six-string, this model is an impressive instrument once you get past the initial familiarity period. That said, a bass like this is not for the faint of heart. At a snip under £4500, it is a serious purchase – but for some players, it might be just what they're looking for.

With a Range of New Models and an Expanding Array of Customisation options, there's a Stonefield® for Everyone

Since entering the musical instrument scene in 2015 Stonefield® has continued to uphold a philosophy of providing innovative, high quality tools for bottom end artisits working with all genres and styles of music. One of our goals has been to provide the best instruments we can create to the widest range of players. Back in 2015 we were offering our highest spec instrument, the M Series. In 2016 we introduced the C Series, an instrument that is hand built to a more affordable price point. Now, In 2018, we're cutting it all loose with the introduction of the manufactured F Series, G Series and our funky little mutant, The Stinger. WIth so much choice avaiable, which Stonefield® will you claim for your own in 2018?



I have to say ... I'd recommend them all

Tomm Stanley
Founder,
Stonefield Musical Instrument Company

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Stonefield®

The Bass You've Always Wanted

SONIC FARM

Tantra head, MAS Bodai 110 cab

Canadian companies Sonic Farm and MAS have collaborated on this tasty audiophile bass rig. Kev Sanders gives both the once-over

Sonic Farm
www.sonicfarm.com

MAS
www.masoundworks.com

£1764 and £805

If you've come across the name Sonic Farm before, it was probably in the studio – perhaps on one of their rackmount processors or the excellent 2DI4 tube DI box. The ground-up designs and use of best-quality components mean that although they're not cheap, their processors have become valued additions to many a studio's outboard inventory.

As a pro bass player, Michael Arnopol of MAS has a unique perspective on building cabinets specifically for bass. His speakers follow the kind of design principles more often seen on high-end hi-fi and PA systems.

Sonic Farm Tantra head

The Tantra bass amp came about as the result of a collaboration between Sonic Farm and MAS. In theory, this should mean that you get the quality of design and build of Sonic Farm allied to the knowledge and expertise of someone who really knows how a bass should sound.

Out of the box, the quality is instantly apparent. Even the tiny stainless steel dome-headed hex-screws that hold the case together look better quality than you'd normally find, as does the printing and thick glossy red finish. The chunky ivory dials hint at retro, while the mini-toggles all switch with a positive and unambiguous 'click' – on to the right, off to the left. Given the number of pots and switches, the control panel does looks a bit cluttered, but the options are fairly self-explanatory; the parametric EQ section in particular is laid out in a way that most studio engineers would quickly recognise.

Like most of Sonic Farm's products, the inner workings of the Tantra amp are hybrid. Two pentode valves take care of the clean gain and overdrive front end, after which the topology is solid state. Evidence that the input is based very much on the company's 2DI4 bass DI box is obvious; the left hand group of five toggle switches are all dedicated to processing the bass signal for the DI. There's loads of versatility here when it comes to attenuation, and choosing the point in the signal chain from which you take your signal to the balanced DI on the amp's comprehensive rear panel. Another clue to the Tantra's studio heritage are the separate power switches for the amp's preamp and power amp stages, meaning that either can be used independently.

Several other features warrant special mention, such as the two controls above the input, marked 'H2' and 'H4'. Above 500Hz, the H2 adds second harmonics – an octave above the note played – and the H4 adds fourth harmonics, which is an octave plus a fifth. This has the subtle effect of brightening and adding body to your bass's sound, which could be useful on a passive bass like my old Precision. Another interesting feature of the Tantra is the three-way High Pass filter, which cuts out subharmonic frequencies below 30, 40 or 60 Hz. This means the amp isn't struggling to amplify inaudible frequencies outside those which it is possible for the cabinet to replicate.

Although the on-board compressor has no adjustment other than for the amount of effect added, all the parameters have been optimised for bass. It reminds me of TC's Spectracomp system, another single-control compressor that works really well.

There's no doubt that to get the best from the Tantra amp you'd need to spend time learning to drive it – and nowhere is this more

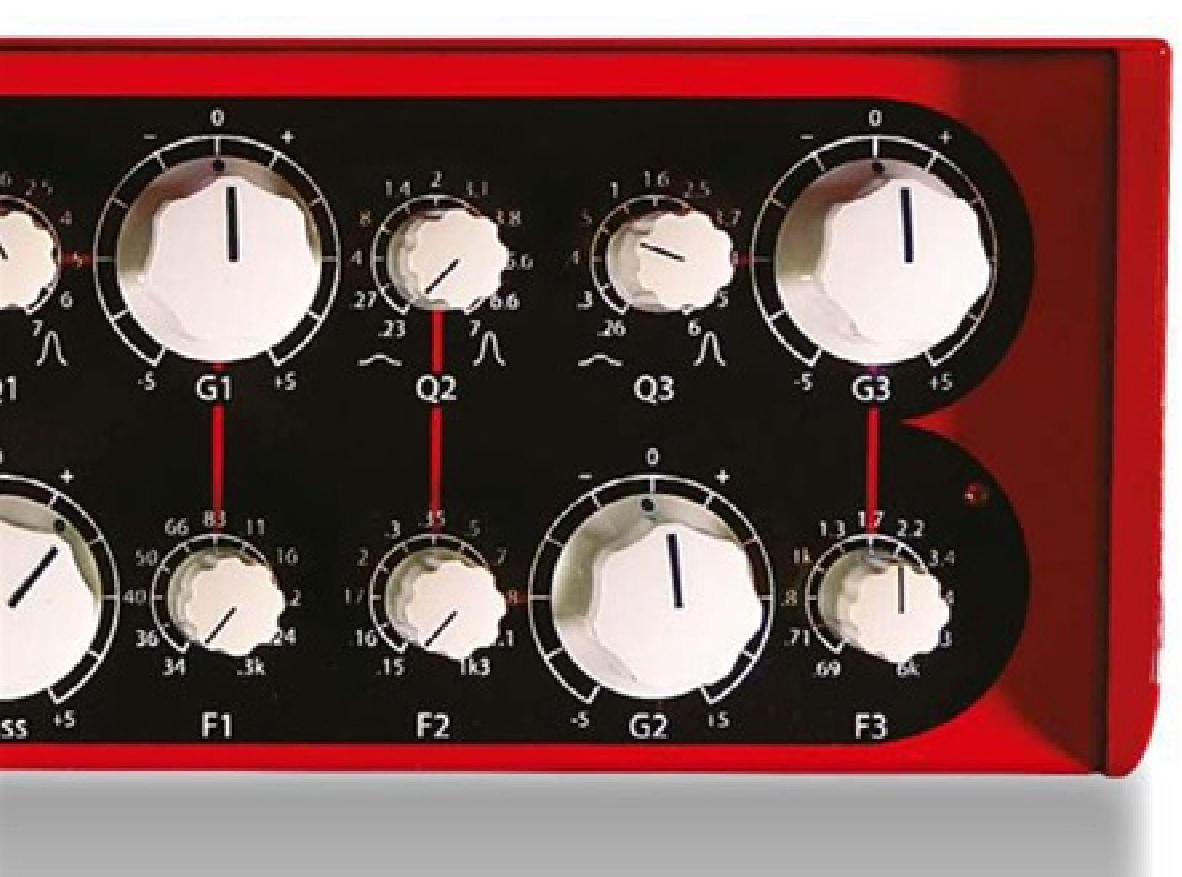
true than in relation to the parametric EQ. If you're used to a 'lo, mid and hi' kind of EQ this is going to take a while, but like everything about the Tantra amp, if you let your ears guide you, then you won't go far wrong. Lastly, a high quality ICE 1000 watt class D amp takes care of business.

MAS Bodai 110 cab

Unlike the Tantra amp, the MAS Bodai 110 cab doesn't shout its quality when you first unbox it. There's a slightly home-made feel about the red and black crinkle-painted finishes, and the satin black grilles, handles and other fittings all suggest hardware from a generic supply catalogue. There's no doubting the quality of the design, but a straw poll among my bass-playing buddies revealed a definite love it/loathe it split regarding the build quality and the aesthetics.

The cabinet design is unusual in that the single Beyma 10" bass driver – a speaker more usually found in high quality PA equipment – is baffle-mounted, with a flared port above and below it. This should mean an extended low end and very good dispersion. The two paper-cone Faital 4" midrange drivers and Celestion compression driver are mounted above in a separate, sealed and ported enclosure, the mids angled inward and the compression driver firing into the mids' output flares behind.

This complex construction means that the cab is fairly weighty, despite the relatively thin 10mm ply from which it's constructed; this is compounded by the drivers. We're getting more and more used to super-lightweight neodymium speakers in our bass cabs these days. Given the weight and materials used for the construction, I do have my slight reservations about the long-term roadworthiness, although if it were used in a studio or perhaps a theatre or church where it was seldom moved, this obviously wouldn't be an issue.



Used together, it's a bit of an odd-looking rig. The Tantra amp, whose width is determined by its rack-mounting potential, is a couple of inches wider than the 110 Bodai cab, although the colour schemes work well together and the 112 version of this cab is a perfect fit.

Plugging in the bass and setting up a good flat sound as a starting point takes a moment or two, but once you're there, the sound quality is stunning. It can be quite a revelation hearing your bass like this for the first time. There's a holographic, almost 3D quality to the sound which you normally only ever hear through the best studio monitors or headphones. The low crossover point means that the 10" bass driver is just taking care of the subs – and this, allied to the clever porting, means that the integration of all the frequencies is as close to seamless as you'll ever hear. That said, when you're standing close to it, there is a slight upper-mid bias, although this can be quickly dialled out with the shelving-type Bass and Treble controls and three-band parametric. The individually adjustable overlapping frequencies and 'Q' width apparently allow for limitless and accurate modification of your tone.

Swapping my usual 'control' active five-string for the old Fender showed just how versatile this rig can be. With subtle adjustment of the EQ and compression, all the soulful, vintage richness of the Precision was beautifully reproduced. The versatile gain stage, based on Sonic Farm's Xcalibur saturation preamp, gives you the option of overdriving the whole signal or only the top end, keeping the integrity of your tone. Switching in the H4 and H2, the added harmonic content took decades off of the wheezy old Fender; suddenly, slapping and tapping sounded as bright and articulate as if played on a modern active bass.

What a stunning rig. The sound quality is right up there with the best I've ever heard, no matter what bass is put through it. If you have the available funds, I can thoroughly recommend both amp and speaker. My only caveat is that for a touring player, the Bodai cab really should have at least a padded cover – and preferably a full flight case.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Sonic Farm Tantra head
Price | £1764
Made in | Canada
Power | 1000 watts Class D
Features | Pentode (valve) front end/ solid state processing section; 1 channel with 2 tube modes: triode and pentode; Overdrive, HP filter at 30, 40 and 60Hz, Bass, Treble plus 3-band fully parametric EQ, Compressor; 2 band harmonic generator. Rear panel: 2 x Speakon out, Preamp out, DI out, Power amp in (all balanced) FX loop, tuner out, foot switch

MAS Bodai 110 cab
Price | £805
Made in | Canada
Power | 600 watts
Speakers | 1 x Beyma 10" 2 x Faital 4" plus Celestion compression driver
Weight | 17 kg
Impedance | 8 ohms

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Breathtakingly detailed and neutral sound
Minus | Cab aesthetics and amp complexity may not suit everyone
Overall | Super-clean, almost holographic bass guitar reproduction

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

ASHDOWN
SZ Funk Face Twin Dynamic Filter

Ashdown Engineering
www.ashdownmusic.com

£299

Want to get your funk on? Then check out Stuart Zender's Funk Face pedal from Ashdown

Stuart Zender is no stranger to these pages, so we've been eagerly awaiting the release of his pedal collaboration with Ashdown – and boy, is it worth the wait! Combining valve drive and wah effects courtesy of a twin filter setup, the Funk Face unit injects fuzz, drive and dirt into your playing by way of a 12Ax7 valve in its drive stage. Using a selector switch on the side of the chassis, the player can opt for the wah effect either before or after the valve; this has a dramatic effect on the sounds. Controls for

Output, the overall level of the pedal, and Drive provide adjustment so you can add some tasteful drive to your tone or aim for snarling, wall-levelling grit.

The Sensitivity control affects the sensitivity (obviously!) of the envelope filter in response to your instrument's output and your playing style. Some experimentation is advisable as a small adjustment can produce significant changes to the effected tone. Selecting the Valve option turns the 'SZ' display red; blue signifies the twin dynamic filters of the wah effect being called into operation; and with both selected, the display turns almost purple with both colours combined.

So how does it sound? Well, we're happy to report that it put a funky smile on our faces. If funk is your thing, and dirty funk at that, you may well be looking at the missing piece of your sound.

> "COMBINING THE DRIVE AND WAH LEADS TO SOME INTERESTING SOUNDS WHICH, IF USED SPARINGLY AND TASTEFULLY, CAN GIVE YOU A STANDOUT BASS FLAVOUR"

We were suitably impressed with the quality of the overdriven sounds, although we would expect nothing less of an Ashdown product; the drive is warm and richly-coloured, and armed with a passive bass, fingerstyle and pick tones ring out. Meanwhile, the funkier side of things certainly come to life once the wah switch is called into play. Your playing attack and technique also have much to do with the sonic results, but no matter how you play, this pedal is a full-on wah and filter fest. Combining the drive and wah leads to some interesting sounds which, if used sparingly and tastefully, can give you a standout bass flavour for soloing and passages in a song where the bass is heavily featured.

Despite the slightly hefty pricetag, the quality of the sounds on offer will certainly appeal to a sizeable chunk of the bass fraternity. Check it out and enjoy!

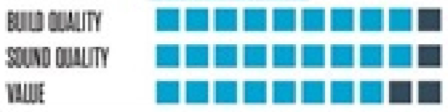
TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £299 **Made in** | England
Features | Output, Drive, Sensitivity, Pre/Post Valve, Valve switch, Wah switch
Dimensions | 120mm x 113mm x 76mm
Power | DC 15-18v DC centre pin negative adapter only
Weight | 1.5 kg

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | A great unit for funk fans and anyone looking to add some spice to their sound
Minus | A little pricey – but listen to the tones
Overall | A well thought-out pedal that surpasses expectations

BGM RATING



BASS TUITION

Making you a better bass player

Welcome to our redesigned tuition section, in which *Bass Guitar Magazine* collates the wit and wisdom of the *crème de la crème* of the electric and upright bass world. We're fortunate enough to have some serious talent on the team, from world-class music educators to experienced touring musicians, who between them have laid down the low notes in every studio, club and arena in the civilised world. Note that we've divided the columns according to Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced level for easy reference. Whether you're looking to improve your playing technique, expand your awareness of theory, set up your rig to sound like your particular bass hero or simply get on a bus and tour, we provide the answers you need here. What are you waiting for? Dive in...
Joel McIver, editor

Kickstart your journey to the top of the bass world here!
Steve Lawson is the UK's most celebrated solo bass guitarist. Across 17 years of touring, and 42 solo and collaborative albums, he's built up a worldwide audience for his looping and processing approach to bass sound. Recent collaborators include Beardyman, Reeves Gabrels, Andy Gangadeen, Tanya Donelly, Divinity Roxx and Jonas Hellborg. He been teaching bass for over two decades, and lectures at universities and colleges across the globe. Victor Wooten once commented, 'Steve Lawson is a brilliant musician. I've known about him and listened to him for many years. He may not be one of the most famous bassists – but he is definitely one of the most talented'. Who are we to argue?
www.stevelawson.net

STEVE LAWSON

Beginners | 74

Now you're rolling with theory and techniques, it's time to hit the next level
Stuart Clayton has been a professional musician, writer and transcriber since 2002 and has worked in almost every conceivable musical situation – function bands, cruise ship gigs, theatre shows and more. He spent four years recording and touring the world with legendary Emerson, Lake & Palmer drummer Carl Palmer and has worked for BGM since its first issue. Since 2007 Stuart has worked as the Head of the Bass Department at BIMM Bristol, where he continues to teach all levels of the degree course. In addition, he has also worked as the Bass Guitar Technical Specialist for the Rockschool exam board. Stuart now runs Bassline Publishing, which publishes transcription books for legendary bassists such as Mark King, Marcus Miller, Stuart Hamm, Bernard Edwards, Stuart Zender and John Entwistle, as well as an acclaimed range of tuition books.

STUART CLAYTON

Intermediate | 78

Take the bass world by storm with the ultimate tuition section
Philip Mann studied at Basstech, completing the London College of Music's bachelor's degree programme, secured a master's degree in performance and receiving a scholarship to study under Jeff Berlin at the Players School of Music in Florida. He then established himself as a busy electric and double bassist. Endorsed by Overwater and Vanderkley, he has appeared in London's West End and across Europe on many productions. His performance and session credits include recording at the legendary Sun Studios in Memphis, and working with Greek fusion guitarist Tolis Zavaliaris and the Big Band Metheny ensemble. He has featured as a solo demonstration artist at the London Bass Guitar Show every year from 2012. Currently, he is a member of the visiting faculty at the Players School of Music and lectures for Scott's Bass Lessons.

PHIL MANN

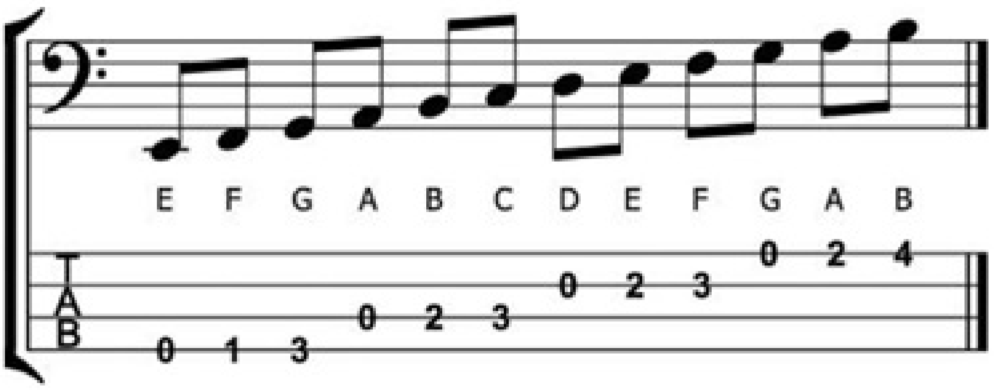
Advanced | 84

BGM Notation Legend

The following is a guide to the notation symbols and terminology used in *Bass Guitar Magazine*

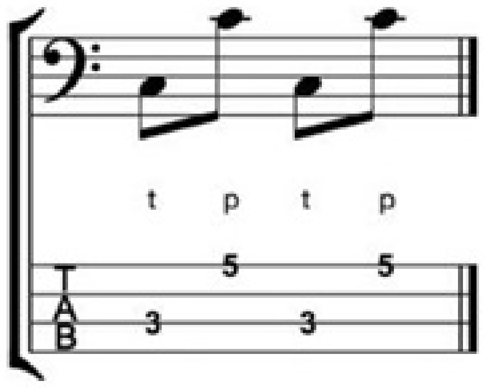
The Stave: most music written for the bass guitar uses the bass clef. The example to the right shows the placement of the notes on the stave.

Tablature: this is a graphical representation of the music. Each horizontal line corresponds with a string on the bass guitar, with the lowest line representing the lowest pitched string (E). The numbers represent the frets to be played. Numbers stacked vertically indicate notes that are played together. Where basses with five or six strings are required, the tablature stave will have five or six lines as necessary.

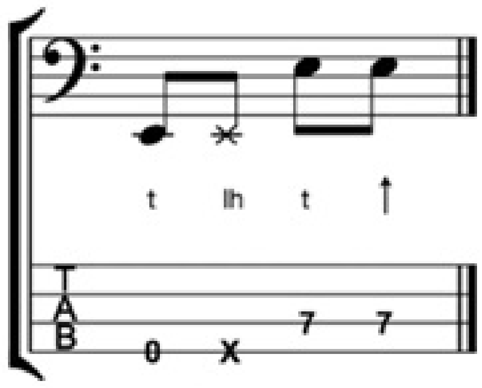


Notes shown in brackets indicate that a note has been tied over from a previous bar.

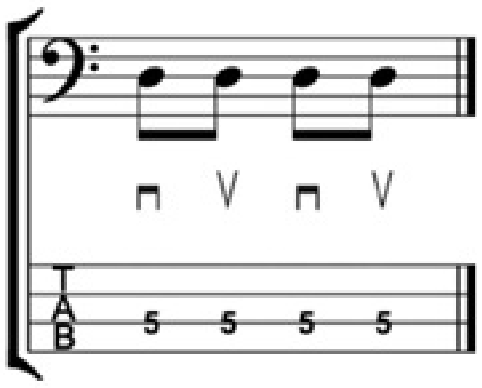
PLAYING TECHNIQUES



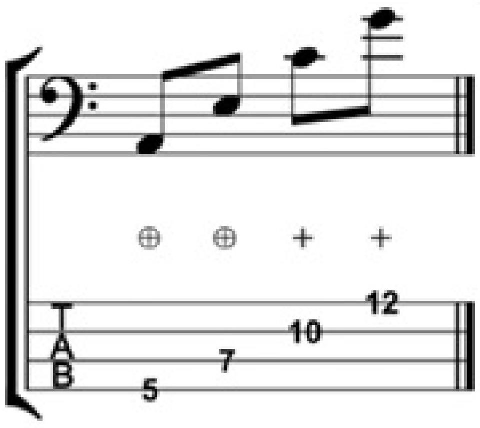
SLAP AND POP TECHNIQUE
Notes slapped with the thumb are marked with a 't', notes popped with the fingers marked with a 'p'



ADVANCED SLAP TECHNIQUE
Fretting hand slaps are marked 'lh' and double thumbing upstrokes are shown with an upward pointing arrow

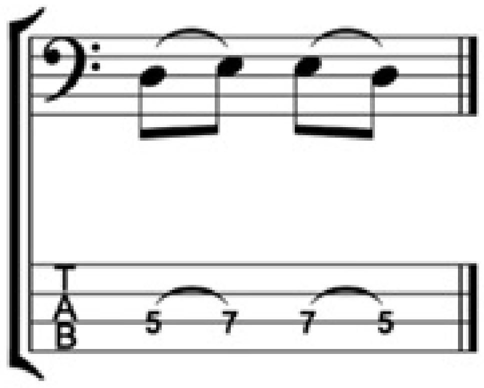


PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE
Where necessary, down and upstrokes with the pick will be shown using these symbols (down-up-down-up)

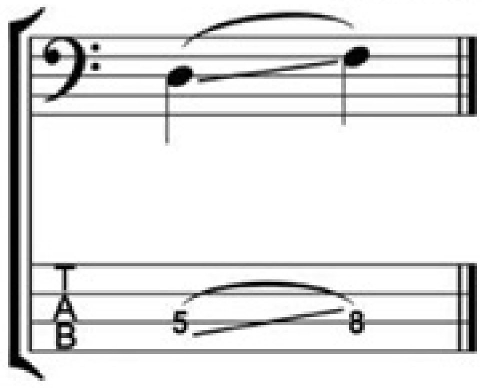


TAPPING TECHNIQUES
Fretting hand taps are shown with a '+' in a circle. Picking hand taps are shown with '+'. Specific fingers will be shown with numbers if necessary

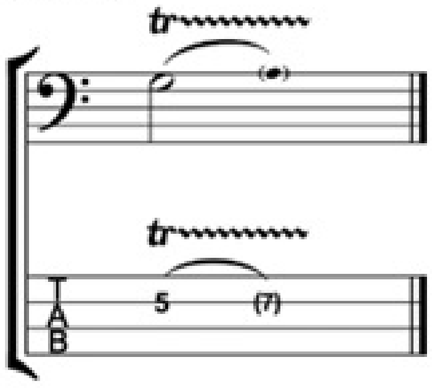
FRETTING TECHNIQUES



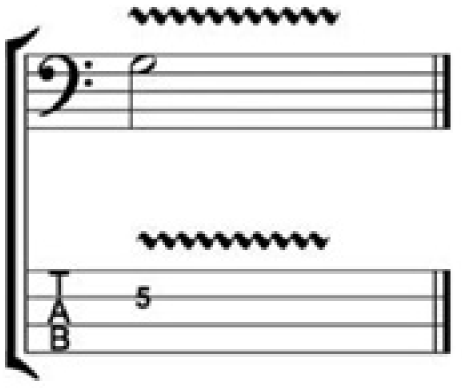
HAMMER-ON AND PULL-OFF
Hammer-ons and pull-offs are shown with a slur over the notes. Only the first note is plucked by the picking hand



SLIDE (GLISSANDO)
Slides are performed by playing the first note then sliding the fretting finger up to the second note

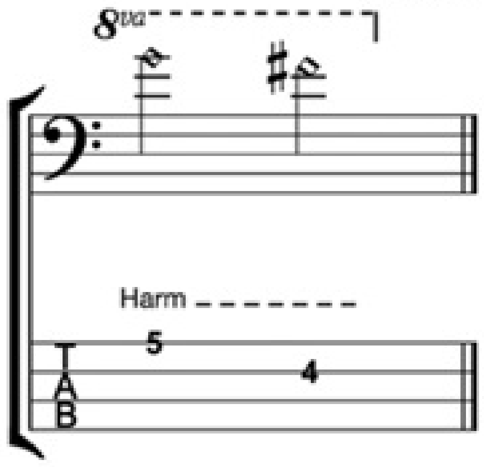


TRILLS
Trills are performed by rapidly alternating between the two notes shown using hammer-ons and pull-offs

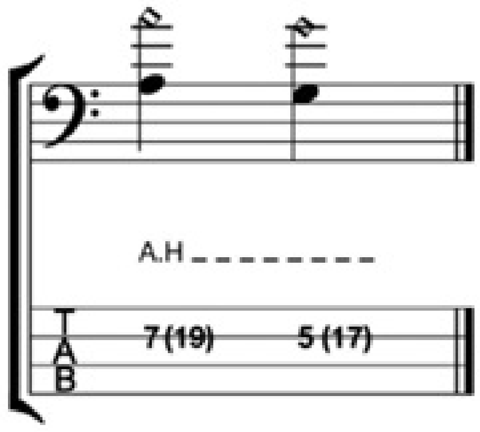


VIBRATO
The pitch of the note is altered by repeatedly bending the string up and back with the fretting finger

PLAYING HARMONICS

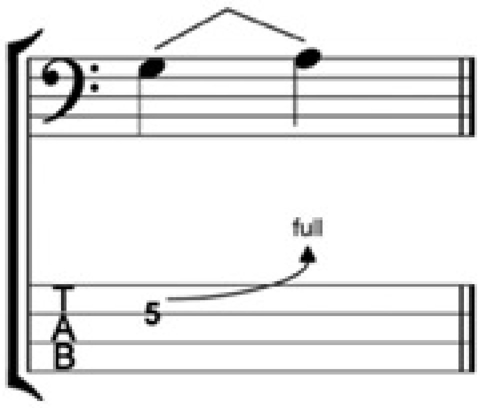


NATURAL HARMONICS
The note is played as a harmonic by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated

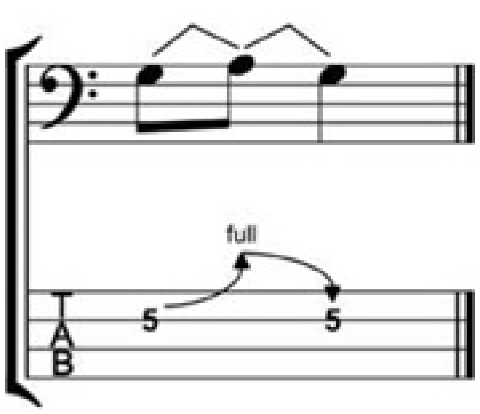


ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS
Pluck the string while fretting the lower note and placing the edge of the picking hand thumb an octave higher (the note shown in brackets)

BENDING NOTES



BEND
The note is bent upwards to the interval specified: ½ = semitone, full = tone



BEND AND RELEASE
The note is bent up to the interval indicated then released back to its original pitch

THE FRONT LINE

Want to make it as a professional bassist? Listen up as BGM's world-class bass team reports back from the tourbus

THE JAZZ BASSIST

RUTH GOLLER

Jazz ninja Ruth joins a two-bassist band — and loves it!

Another London Jazz festival has passed, and as I do every year, I played quite a few gigs with different bands. One very inspiring gig for me this year was with a three-piece contemporary dance group with two double bass players – me being one of them. At first I wasn't quite sure how this was going to work, but soon after the first rehearsal it was clear that it was going to be brilliant. It felt as if we two musicians were really part of the group and the development of the piece – which was already written, but still had room for suggestions and new ideas. We bass players had some prepared parts, but within those structures we had a lot of freedom to produce sounds and ambient noises. As I have mentioned before in this column, I love playing with other double bass players and working out how to make the two basses become one voice. This can be tricky, but when you have the right partner it is such a great experience. The other bass player was Olie Brice, an amazing musician and improviser whose music and playing I highly recommend. It always surprises me how different two basses can sound, and of course, you only get this chance to really compare when you play together. It's inspiring because you hear other people's sound and choices while playing with them, which is somehow different when you only listen to them from the audience. Somehow the musical awareness changes if you know that you have the power to change and influence things around you, which of course comes with a certain responsibility. Another thing I really loved about the piece was that there was a lot of silence in between sections; when the two basses came in, their impact was even stronger. I really enjoy playing with a period of silence in that way, especially when you have two double basses to follow it – and who can make a profound statement.

www.ruthgoller.com

THE METALHEAD

DANIEL FIRTH

Cradle Of Filth bassist Dan reveals that less is more

Writing bass parts in an extreme metal band can sometimes be a bit of a battle. It's a world of relentless kick drums, chugging guitars that deeply invade the bass's sonic territory and intense speeds that don't allow for a whole lot of clarity in the lower frequencies. That's why my personal approach to writing bass parts could probably be described as understated. I see bass as the glue that holds an extreme song together. When everyone else is going at light speed, I'm favouring eighth notes over sixteenths, locking in tightly with the kick drum and solidly underpinning riffs to give them context. Bass strings need a bit of time for the note to fully manifest once they've been picked, so even though it can be fun to play fast – sometimes irresistibly so – I rarely find that it's what serves the song best. In the same spirit, I firmly believe that pedalling a note can often be the most powerful weapon in your arsenal. It's not a flashy approach that frequently jumps out at the listener, but it's the kind of writing that I think would be very much missed if it wasn't there. I've usually found when demoing songs that if I start noodling, the riffs tend to lose their overall power. That's not to say there isn't a time and place for the bass to really sing, but there needs to be space for it to breathe. With that being the case, I'm more inclined towards the melodic and playful when a song breaks down in pace, or in those dynamic moments when the guitars are stripped away. If anything, when I decide to deviate from the root notes and add a bit of tension, I feel it's best to be deliberate about it. There have been occasions when a riff I've written is suffering from sounding too jolly – the guys in Cradle Of Filth refer to these as my 'Running Wild' riffs – but with a bit of boldness on the bass and experimentation with where you anchor a part, you can really change the overall mood. That's the sort of thing that I like to bring to the table when writing, and it makes more of an impact than quick, flashy runs, which are all too likely to be lost in the chaos of an extreme metal song.

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www.cradleoffilth.com

THE ALTERNATIVE ROCKER

MICHAEL MCKEEGAN

Note down the notes, advises Therapy? bassist Mike

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We're in the thick of writing and rehearsal pre-production here, and it's now getting to the stage where the songs are being re-tweaked and micro-refined. It's been quite intensive as of late, and it got me wondering what the best way might be of keeping track of the songs' progress and the development of my bass parts. Over the years I've found it far too easy to be working on something great, only to have it completely forgotten by the time I turn up at the next rehearsal. Obviously, route one would be to write the music down; with either sheet music or some notation software you could easily document your parts. Also, reasonable-sounding demos are a godsend when it comes to having an impartial listen to the songs and structures. As I don't have much grasp of music theory, I rely on a couple of my own random methods to keep an eye on where I'm at. First up, I normally try and record all the sessions, even when we're jamming, as there are occasional golden moments which can be isolated and worked up into the finished song. Keep the recorder running, and write out backup notes to reference any bits that catch your ear for later. Do try to number the different versions. I promise you this will make it easier to keep track of what's happening where. The other thing I do for speedy recall is to write out the basic parts in a notebook. It's the same one I've been using for the past eight years and it has the guts of our last four albums mapped out in there. In lieu of musical notation I have my own 'code' of how to mark out the parts, which is basically a weird mix of tab and written notes. I jokingly refer to it as my 'Diary Of A Madman' due to the mostly incomprehensible scribbles in it, but it's saved me on more than a few occasions where I struggled to recall the exact details of a particular bass-line. Nothing will ever beat having a song hardwired into your head – but at the early stages where parts are ever-shifting, it's good to have a backup set of notes, or a decent reference recording, to serve as prompts where necessary.

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THE EXTENDED-RANGE SPECIALIST

STEWART MCKINSEY

The string's the thing, says 10-stringer McKinsey

For today's instalment we revisit how to manipulate the strings for different qualities from the notes you play. The elements I want you to consider when activating the string with your plucking hand are 1) attack, 2) where along the string's length you are playing, and 3) the part of your fingers used to strike the string. The combination of these three factors will have a profound effect on your timbre. Your attack – the force with which you are playing – is the most obvious part of conveying energy to the string. Essentially you are fueling the note with an aggressive or more subdued application of strength. Each will create a different path for the note to open, blossom and fade. To cut through we often play harder but sometimes to really bring bass presence to a passage, you want to use a softer attack. Where on the string you choose to play will have another impact on the note. As you move towards the bridge, your notes will gain focus and articulation, which is why many fingerstyle funk and fusion players choose to articulate this way. Jaco Pastorius was a master of this. Note that as you move toward the middle of the bass your notes gain fullness and warmth, making this a great approach to take on more traditional jazz tunes and ballads. Many of us overlook the importance of which part of our fingers pulls the note from the string. When you use the tip of a finger, it is more like a plectrum, giving the notes a sharper edge and taking some of the warmth and roundness from what you're playing. Similarly, using the meatier side of the finger – or the length of your thumb – will open the notes up quite a lot and give them softness, with a bias toward the lower midrange and bass frequencies. Finally, as we use strings that are both bigger and smaller than those of standard-range basses, experiment to find out how these elements can enhance your playing as well as your composition. Find your way inside the notes. Getting a note is easy, but infusing it with what you are as a person and an artist is a life's pursuit. Make it a good one, and your audience will appreciate it in ways you cannot imagine. Strive to be more than an instrumentalist; be a musician.

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STEVE LAWSON

Beginners' Tutorial

New to all things low end? Let Steve Lawson be your guide. This month: time is of the essence

Welcome back! I hope you had a funky disco-filled month experimenting with octave patterns. This month we're going to have a think about time, tempo, pulse and groove. There are, broadly, two ways to relate to time as a musician – internal and external. Internal time is about how you feel it; external is about relating to something else that has its own (fixed or wavering) sense of time. That other thing could be another musician, or it could be a sequenced part, a drum loop, a track that you've laid down yourself with a loop pedal, a metronome or a click track in a studio, or on a gig that has sequenced parts running.

Each of these requires specific skills, applied in different ways, but all of them come back to our two core principles that we're working on – control and awareness. Being able to play to an external time reference isn't just about developing 'metronomic time'. Until the advent of computers and click tracks, there was no such thing as an absolute reference for time.

When we recorded to tape, you couldn't 'see' the music; we weren't lining up wave forms to try and perfect an edit. And no-one performed or recorded to a click until the technology was there to do edits. Click tracks weren't about making performances better, they were about making it easier to fix bad ones. If everyone is playing to a click, you can piece ideas and parts together much more easily than if the underlying time of the piece has ebb and flow to it.

Listen to almost any record made before about 1980; you'll hear fluctuations in time, and nobody was complaining. All the great jazz records of the 50s, 60s and 70s have beautiful fluctuations in tempo and groove. Pieces grow in intensity and speed up, they lay back for certain solos and speed up for others. That's the sound of musicians applying their control of their instruments to their awareness of what should happen. Most of the time, no-one is thinking about speeding up, it just happens as the performance changes.

With the advent of studio click tracks, and particularly with sequencing and heavy editing of recorded music, playing to a metronomic click became a core skill for a particular set of pop musicians. You still have the feel generated by the musicians; certain beats are felt late or early in order to give the track either a laid-back or high-energy feel, but the click designates where the pulse should be, and keeps the tempo fixed throughout the song.

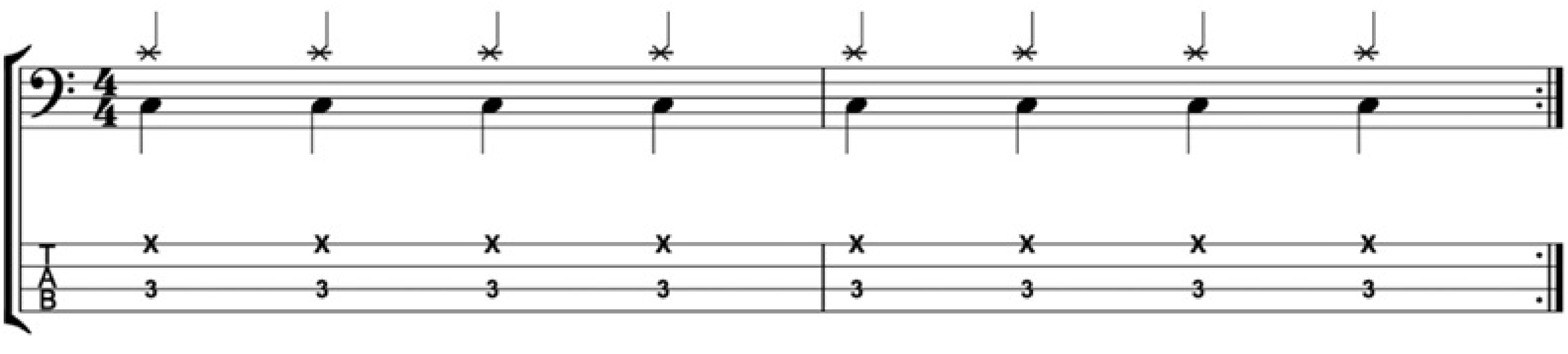
How does this help us with learning the bass? Well, so much of what we do as bassists is about time. With precious few exceptions, the situations we find ourselves in require us to be one of the main links between the groove and the harmony. Our sense of where the pulse of the music is has a huge impact on the overall feel, and our ability to adapt to a range of different external time references allows us to play in a range of different situations and styles.

We also need to develop an internal sense of consistency. Having control over your internal sense of time doesn't mean being a slave to a metronome, but it does require that you play consistently when required. If you ever find yourself playing in a group that has no drummer (a drummerless jazz trio, for example), having a strong internal sense of consistent pulse will serve you very well indeed.

So, how do we develop this? For me, one of the most important awareness skills is the ability to subdivide whatever regular pulse you're hearing. Whether that's just a count in from a drummer, or a click that you're playing to in the studio, hearing how the rest of the possible notes relate to the fixed pulse will greatly improve your ability to sit comfortably with both internal and external time references.

Let's start by just playing four notes in the bar with a click on all four. This may be harder than it first seems:

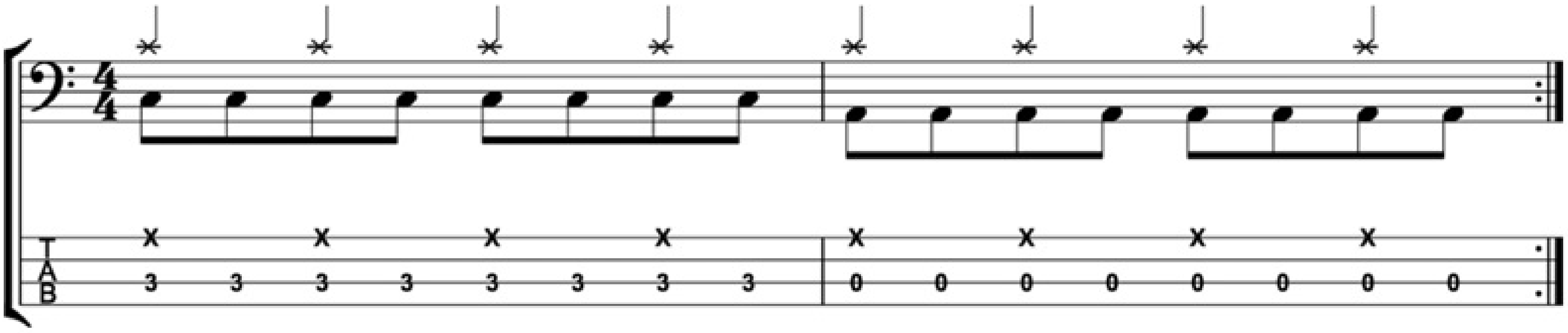
Example 1



Set your metronome, or the click in your music recording software, to 100bpm. If you can, record yourself playing to the click, and try to play the notes as consistently as you can, for four, eight and 16 bars at a time. Play straight eighth notes, both staccato (cut off) and legato (long and flowing into each other). Try to keep the dynamics – in other words, the volume of each note – consistent, and work on keeping the tone the same through the whole thing. Listen back to the recording – how was it? These foundational exercises are a regular part of my practice routine, focusing on control and awareness.

Okay, let's double the number of notes:

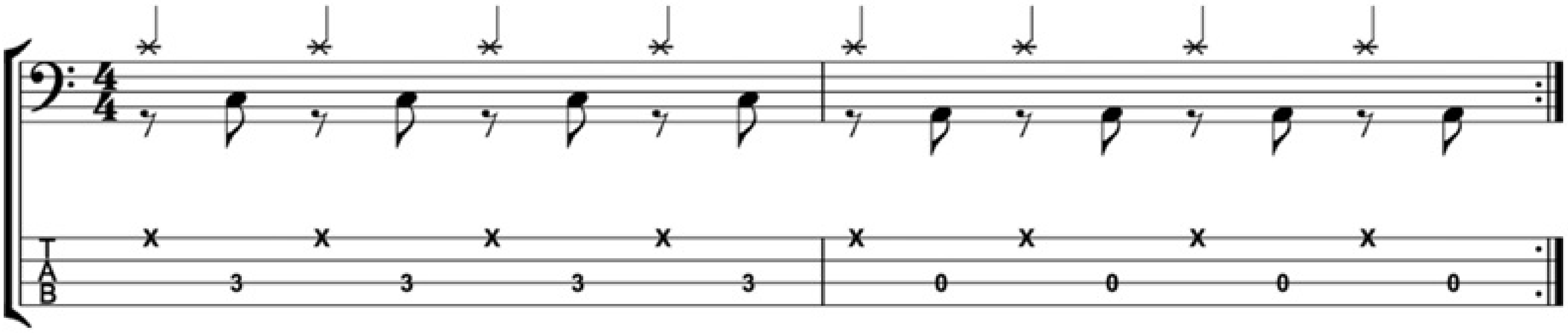
Example 2



We're still aiming for consistency, making ourselves aware of what it feels like to play this type of line accurately. Try playing along with a song or two that use constant eighth notes in the bass – for example, 'With Or Without You' by U2 is one bar each of D, A, B and G for the whole song, and 'She Sells Sanctuary' by the Cult is two bars of D plus one bar each of C and G, with the last bar switching to B and G under the verses. Use your ears to work out what's happening, apply the concepts we discussed about tone and feel a couple of months back, and compare how it feels to play eighth notes along with a full band versus how it feels with a click just on quarter notes.

For **Example 3**, we're going to play just the off-beat. When we're not playing on top of the click, we need to hear the click as part of the line we're playing. This is where being able to choose the sound for your click track comes in helpful. The digital beep of many standalone metronomes is far less musical than a cowbell, cross stick or kick drum sound, so if you have the resources to do so, try programming the click using a more pleasing sound.

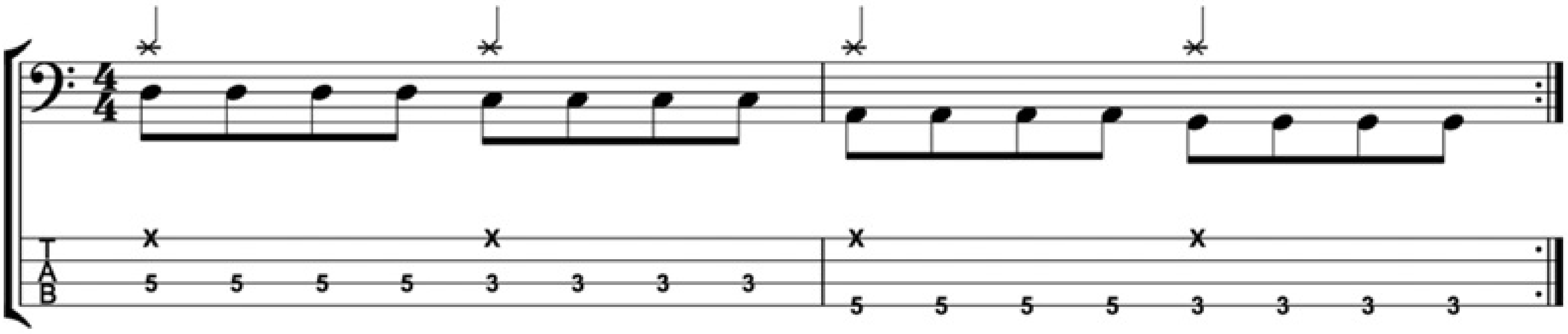
Example 3



Again, vary the length of the note – mute it right on the click, or let it ring through. How does that affect how accurately you're able to play it? Control is about the ability to play whatever it is that the track requires, so being stuck with only one possible way to articulate the line will make life harder going forward, when your bandmates want the feel to be slightly different.

Being able to play to a click on all four beats is a specific skill, rather than the be-all-and-end-all of developing or practising playing in time to a pulse. It's easy to fool yourself that your time is better than it is by constantly making micro-adjustments. In this way you can play close enough to the click that you're keeping up with it, but without having internalised how to subdivide the beat. One great way to work on that internalised time is to halve or even quarter the number of clicks, so let's move to the click just being on 1 and 3:

Example 4



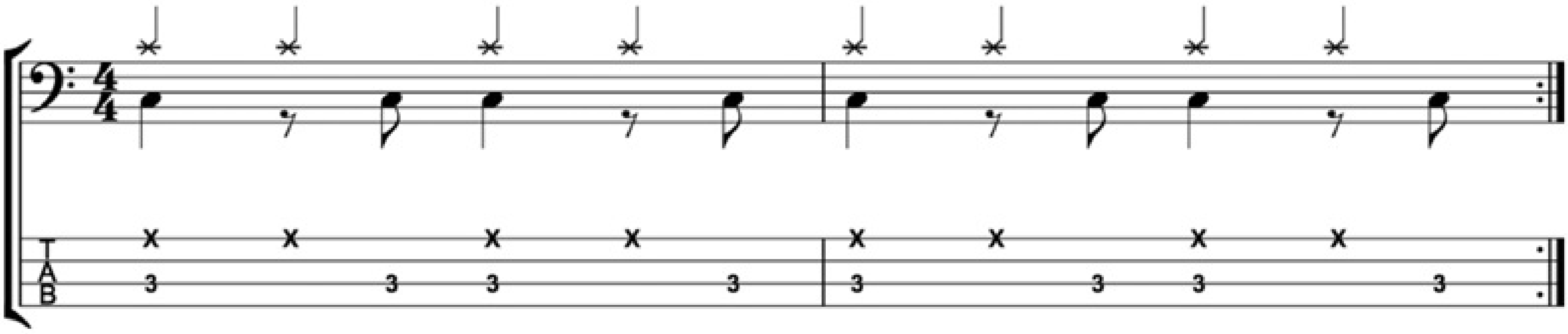
"IT'S EASY TO FOOL YOURSELF THAT YOUR TIME IS BETTER THAN IT IS"

Here's an important note – notice that we've changed the line. You don't need to have the click running while you're working out the line. Get your fingering right at a slow speed, work on any issues that string-crossing might be causing, focus on consistent tone and dynamics before you turn the click on. Adding the click in too early will just stress you out and give you more to worry about than is necessary. All practice should be layered to focus on distinct things first, and then combined as those skills are assimilated into your playing. So, make life easy on yourself – get the line right, then add in the external reference.

Now, try **Example 4** again, but with the click just on beat 1 of the bar. How easy is it to even hear where the notes are supposed to be? If you've programmed the click part, you can set it up to progressively remove beats. Play 16 bars with it on all four, then 16 with it just on beats 1 and 3 and then leave it running with just the click on beat 1. How long before you start to drift out of time? Try again. This can take time, but it's a really useful one for revealing just how much your own sense of time is dependent on micro-corrections to an external source, and how well you've actually developed an ability to maintain a consistent tempo running off your internal clock.

Let's finish up this month with a couple of exercises looking at syncopation along with a fixed pulse. Syncopation refers to any deviation from regular pulse. Let's try a simple one first:

Example 5



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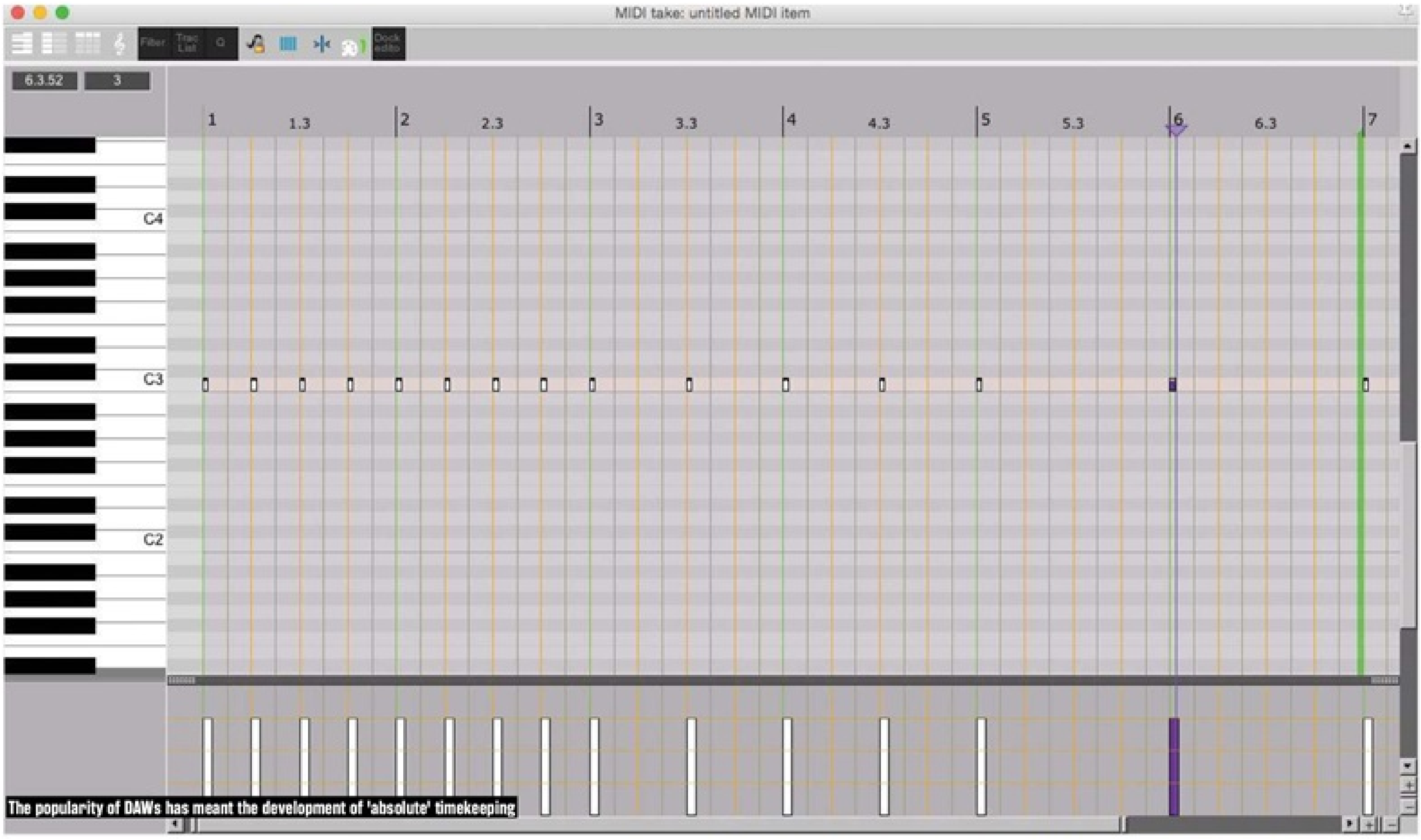
Steve Lawson performs at the London Bass Guitar Show



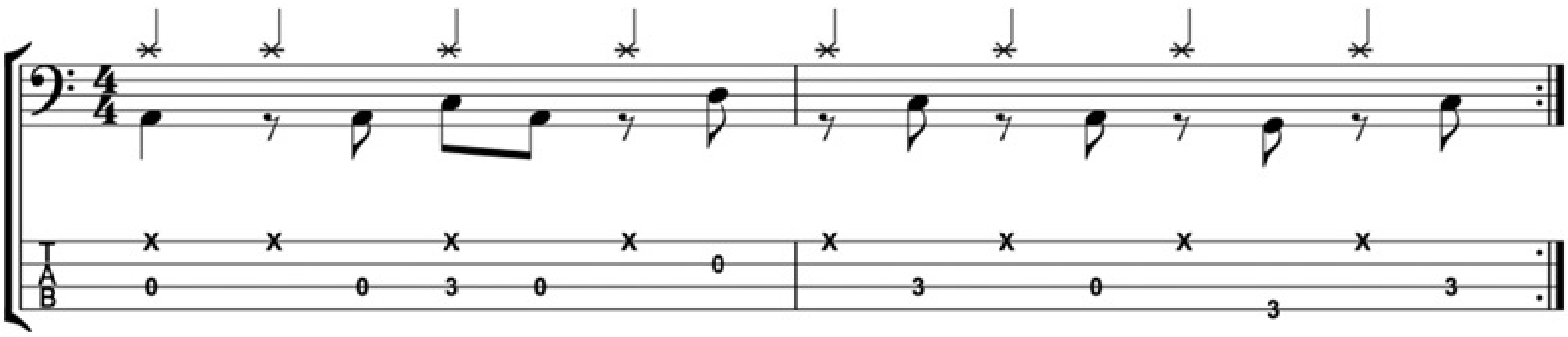
The popularity of DAWs has meant the development of 'absolute' timekeeping

"OUR ABILITY TO RELATE TO EXTERNAL TIME IS A CORE SKILL THAT DESERVES OUR ATTENTION"

Note, we have a rest on beats 2 and 4, with the bass note landing between that click and the next beat. The rhythm here is the base of so many pop, country and singer-songwriter feels, and is a very common kick drum pattern, so it's useful to get comfortable with.

Finally for this month, **Example 6** consists of a slightly busier, syncopated line across two bars. Again, take it nice and slowly, work out the notes first, get the rhythm mapped out in your head (either program it, or ask a friend who reads well to play it for you first if you feel that helps), and then add the click. Try it with the disappearing click sequence we outlined above – 16 bars with click on all 4, 16 bars just on beats 1 and 3, then down to just a click on the first beat of the bar.

Example 6



Pay particular attention to the fact that there are only two notes on the beat. When you've got the click on all four beats, you can hear that click as part of your line, but as the clicks get further apart, you need to be able to internally 'hear' the subdivision that your offbeat relates to. These things are often counted as '1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &', and here we're very focused on the positioning of all the '&'s. It can take a lot of practice to internalise time, and a lot more to get familiar with the huge variety of possible forms of external time you'll have to play with. If the majority of your practice so far has been playing along with recordings of whole songs, even just playing a track where there's no bass part to let you know that you've got it right can feel exposed. But in order to move towards the goal of playing with other musicians, or even creating music on our own using sequences or sampled instruments to create the rest of the track, our ability to relate to external time is a core skill that deserves our attention and focus. Have fun!

STUART CLAYTON

Intermediate Tutorial

Is bass mastery within your sights, but still some way to go? Stuart is the tutor for you. This month: picks and semiquaver rhythms continued

Welcome back to my regular series of columns on plectrum playing. Over the past few months we have been building on the basics of the technique, gradually adding new rhythms into our repertoire and tackling exercises of increasing complexity. In this month's instalment, we are going to continue looking at semiquaver-based rhythms, this time focusing on the various complexities that result from using rests, ties, hammer-ons and pull-offs. Although each of these elements presents a challenge, the solution to each is the same, and is far simpler than it might seem.

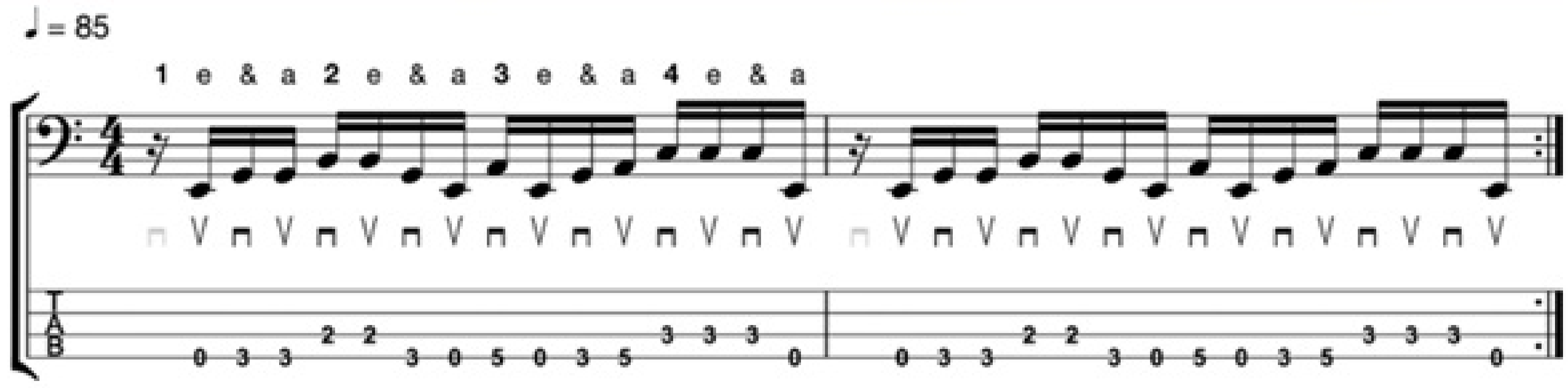
Syncopated Semiquaver Rhythms

Earlier in this series we covered quaver-based grooves that began on an upbeat, and were therefore best played starting with an upstroke. Now that we are playing rhythms based on the semiquaver subdivision, the same logic applies: because we are applying a *down-up-down-up* picking sequence to a full crotchet beat of semiquavers, it stands to reason that even if one of these notes isn't played for some reason, the picking sequence must remain intact. Let's look at how this works:

Example 1

In this example, the line begins on the second semiquaver of the beat – the 'e' in the vocalisation '1-e-and-a'. To perform this, you should play a **silent downstroke** on the beat – this will allow you to play the first actual note with an upstroke and ensure that the correct picking pattern is used from that point onwards. To better illustrate this, I have faintly noted the required silent downstrokes.

As you play this line over and over, you should find that the concept becomes very clear to you.

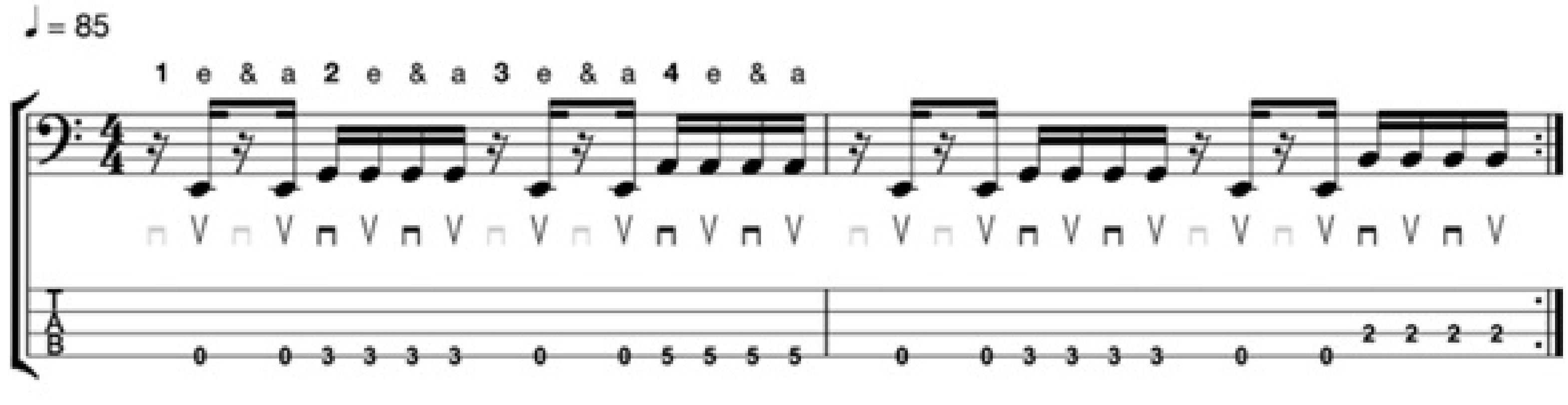


Here's a tip you might find useful: if you are struggling with the concept of playing a silent downstroke, try playing a ghost note instead. Then, as you become comfortable with the sound of the line, try to replace this ghost note with a rest.

Let's check out another example of this concept.

Example 2

In this example, the only notes played within the first beat are those which fall on the syncopated parts of the beat: the 'e' and 'a' of '1-e-and-a'. Again, silent downstrokes should be employed in order to ensure that these notes are played with upstrokes. This will mean that you land on the second beat with a downstroke as normal, which will make playing this line more comfortable.



Again, you could play ghost notes instead of rests initially in order to become comfortable with the concept.

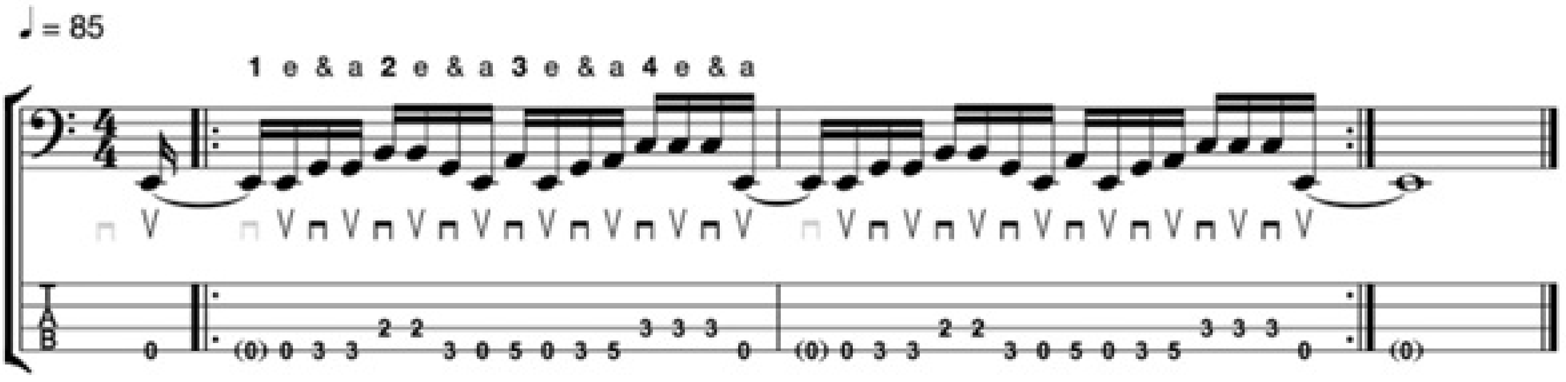
Using Tied Rhythms

The use of ties in music can also result in rhythms that begin on upstrokes. Consider the following example:

Example 3

This bass-line is almost identical to **Example 1** but features an **anacrusis** – a brief phrase, less than a bar in length that begins the line. In this case the anacrusis is a semiquaver, which is tied into the first bar of the phrase.

As this note belongs on the final semiquaver of the beat, it should be preceded with a silent downstroke (shown for illustration purposes) and then played with an upstroke. You should then play another silent downstroke on the first beat of the bar and then play the following E with an upstroke. The technique used here is exactly the same as before: a silent downstroke is played on the beat in order to accommodate the upstroke on the syncopation.

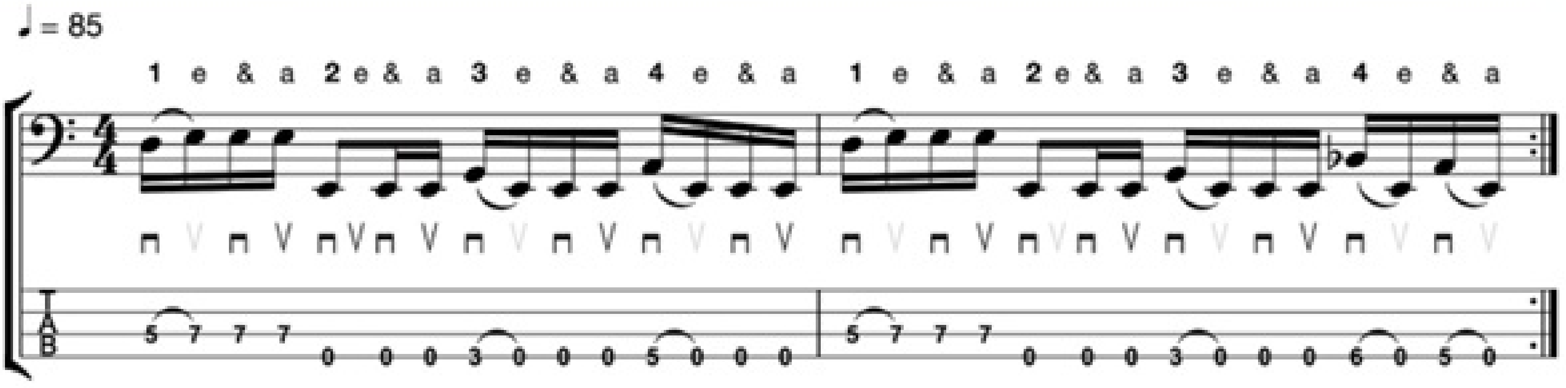


Using Hammer-Ons and Pull-Offs

There is one final instance to consider in which silent strokes will be necessary, and that is when hammer-ons or pull-offs are used. As you no doubt know already, each of these devices is a type of **slur**, whereby multiple notes are performed by the fretting hand although the string is only played once by the picking hand. As you can imagine, the use of these devices is going to have an impact on our plectrum playing. Consider the following example:

Example 4

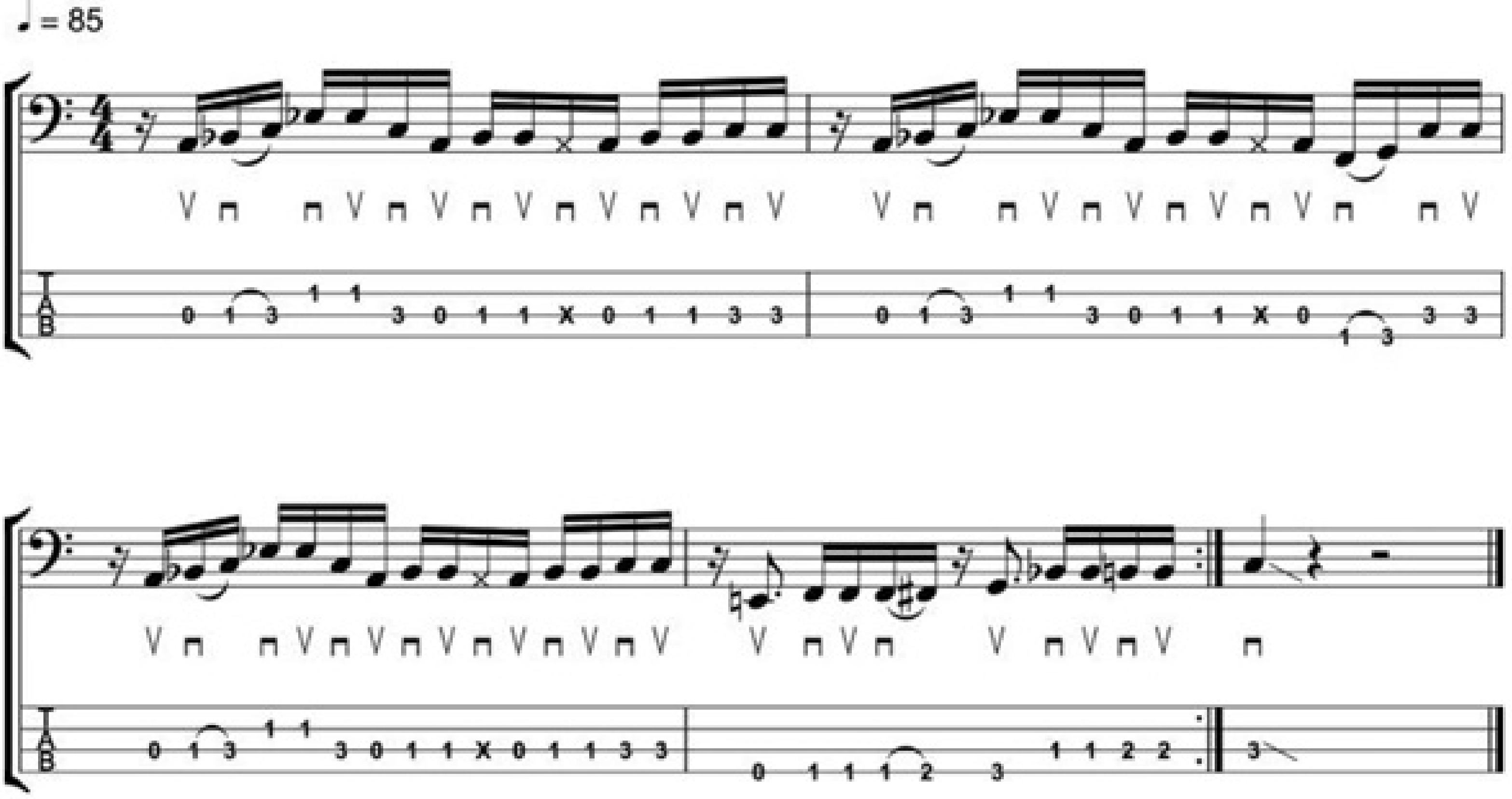
In this semiquaver-based groove, both hammer-ons and pull-offs have been used. As you can see, where each device is employed, a silent stroke has been written in order to illustrate what your picking hand should do to ensure that the correct picking sequence can continue.



With these essential concepts covered, the remainder of this column will focus on getting you to employ them in the context of some grooves. Note that silent strokes will no longer be indicated in the picking guides.

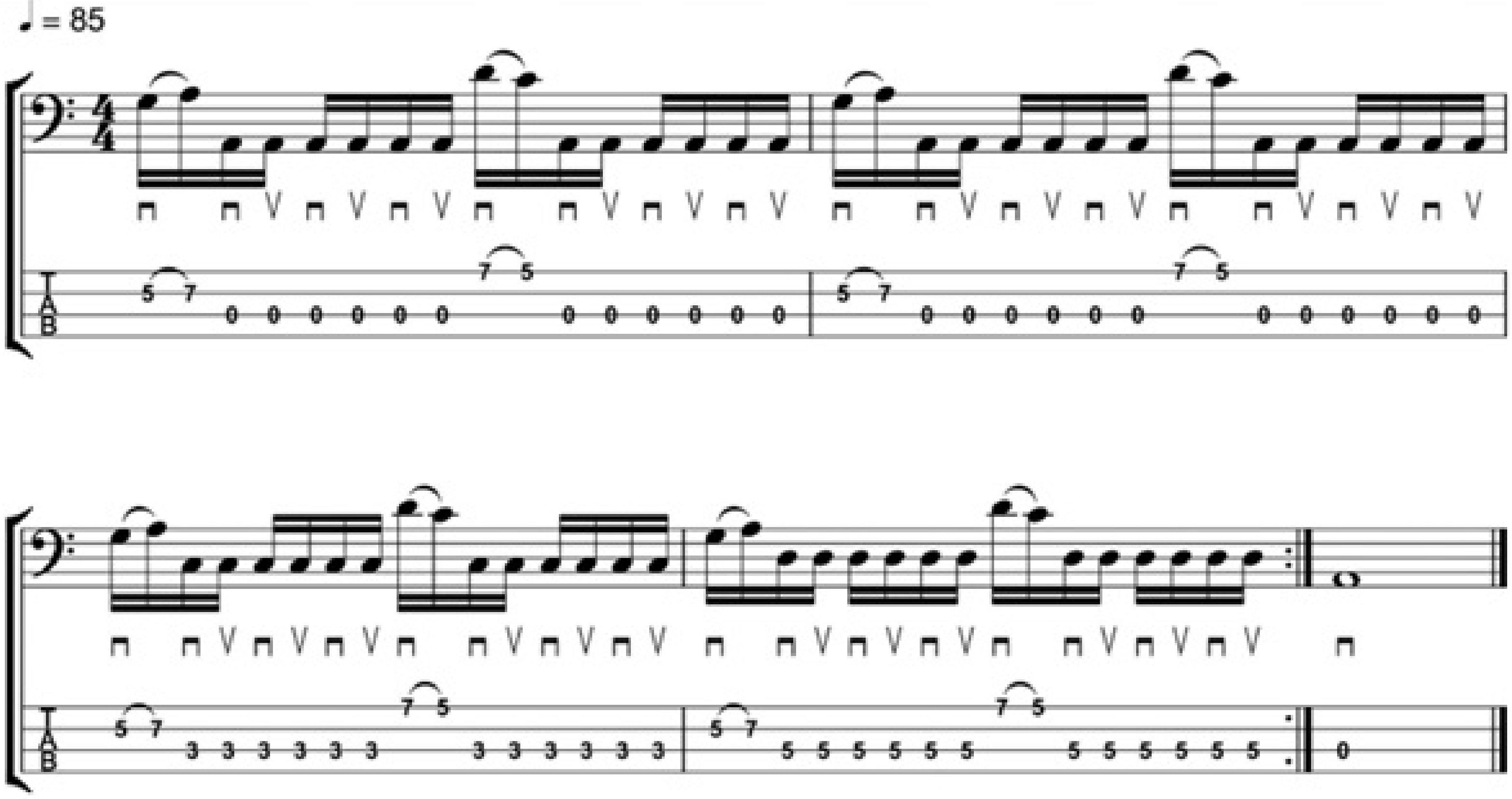
Example 5

This line is a funk groove where the main phrase begins on the second semiquaver of the bar. This line also includes some hammer-ons.



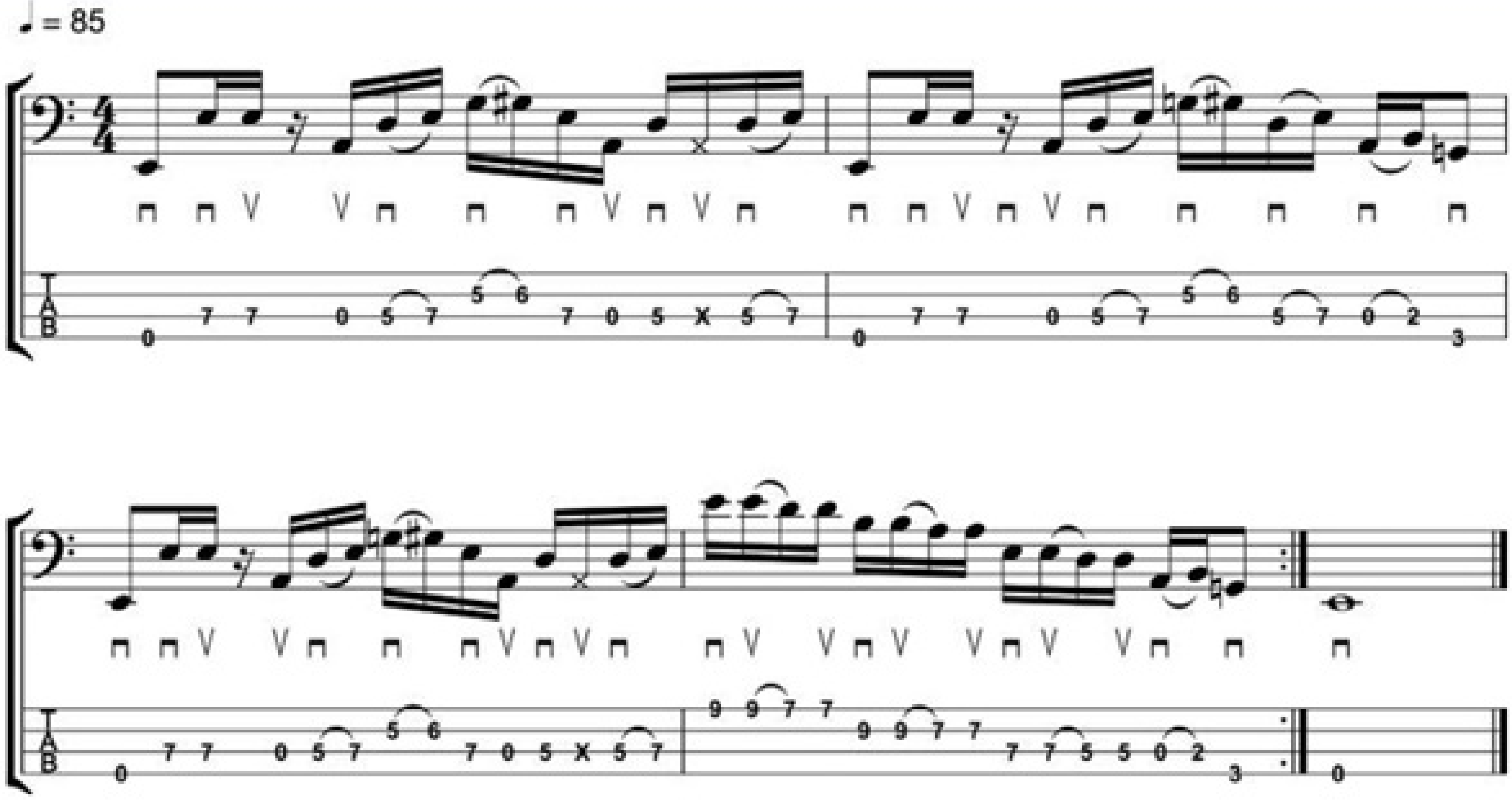
Example 6

This exercise is a continuous semiquaver line that features both hammer-ons and pull-offs. Note that these figures remain the same even when the bass notes below them change in the third and fourth bars. These changes will lead to some rather awkward fingerings for your fretting hand.



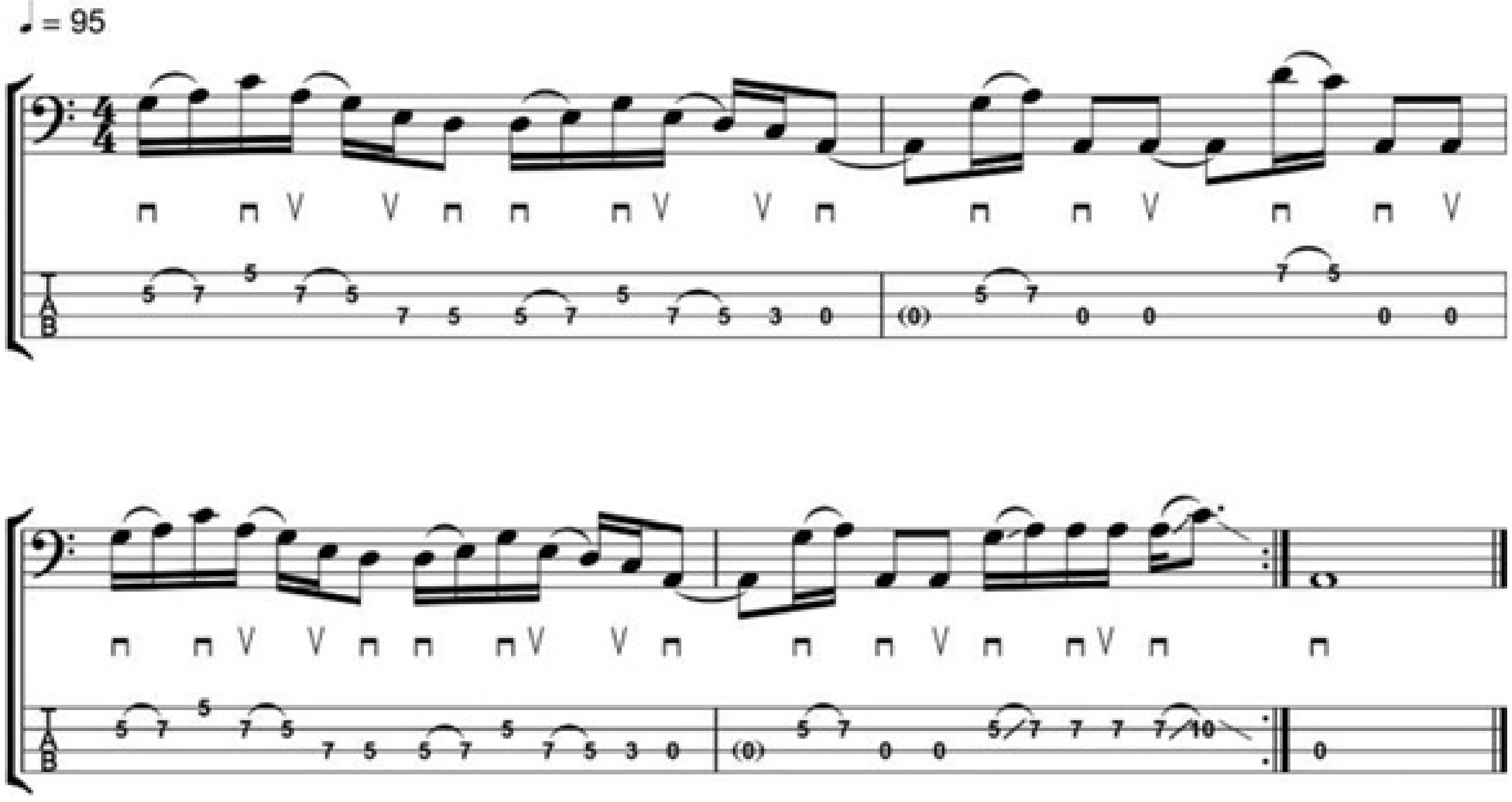
Example 7

Here's a slow rock groove that mixes E Mixolydian and E minor pentatonic sounds. The pull-off phrase in the fourth bar is a tough one – watch out for the two upstrokes in a row.



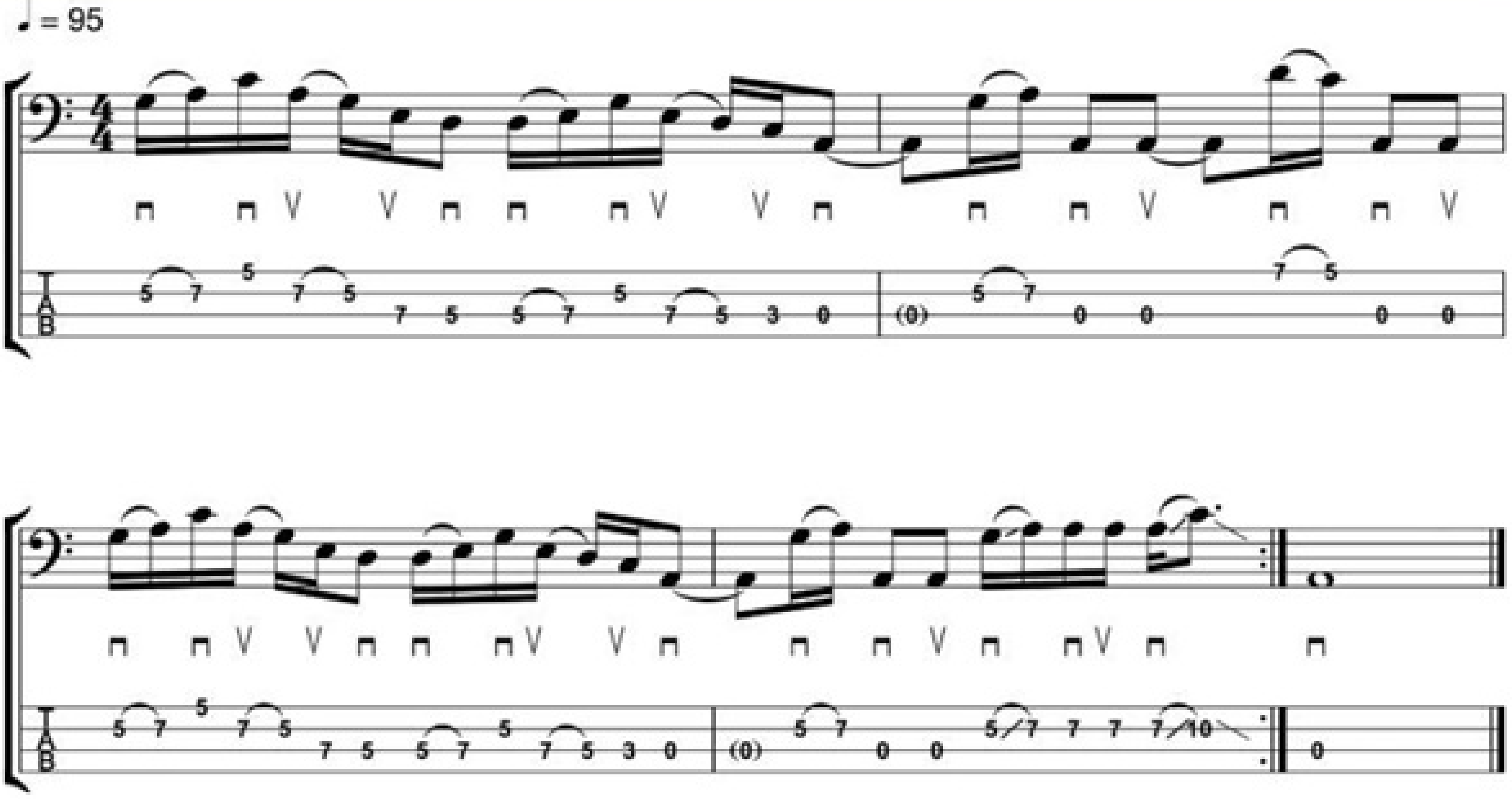
Example 8

This is a pop bass-line that features a good deal of string crossing as well as several hammer-on figures.



Example 9

Here's another pop bass-line that uses a lot of hammer-on and pull-off figures. There are also some slides in the fourth bar: remember when playing these, only the first note is struck, the second is performed by sliding upwards with the fretting hand.



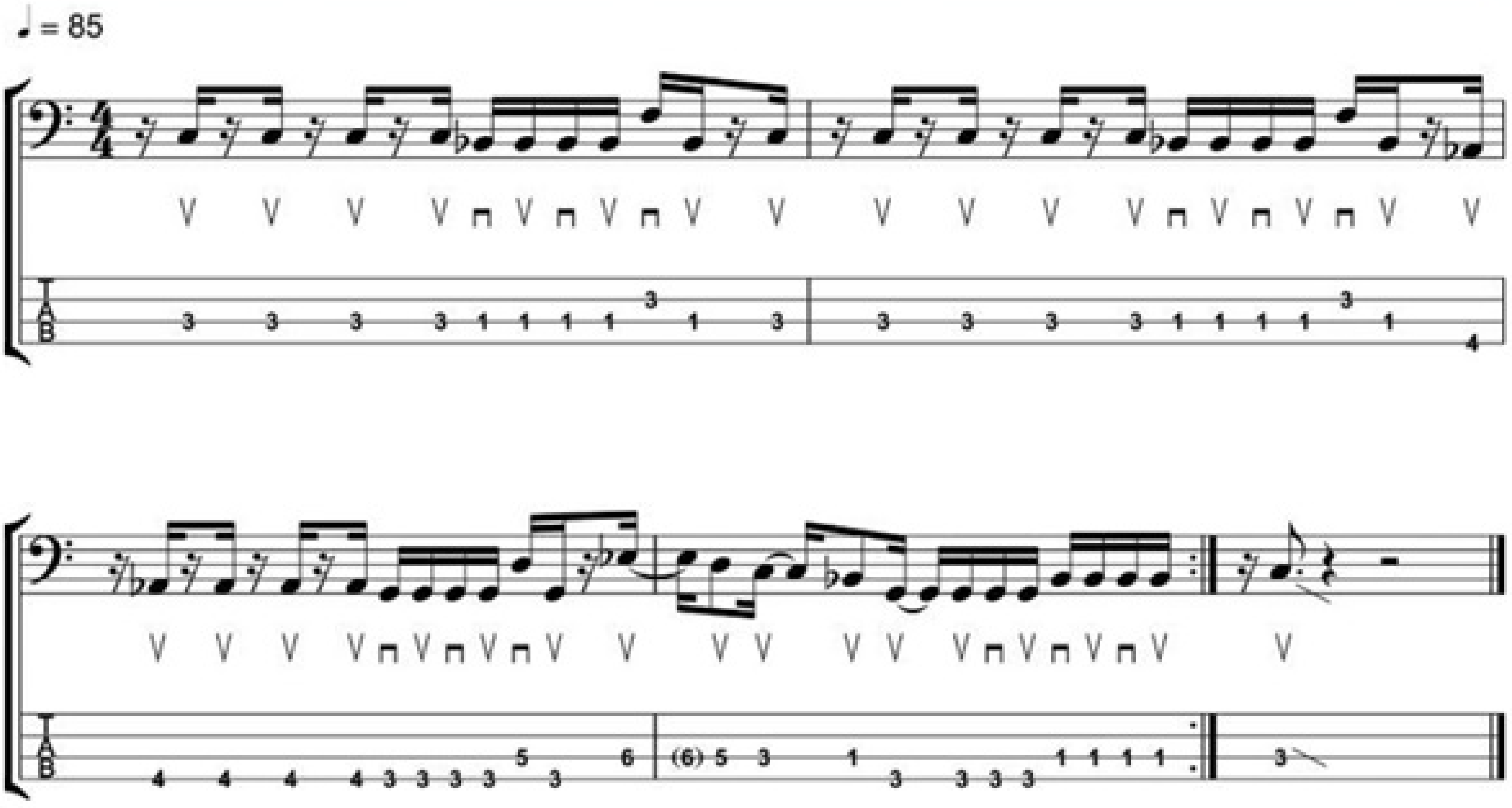
"REMEMBER THAT AT ALL TIMES, YOU MUST AIM FOR CLEAN, ACCURATE TECHNIQUE: EVEN TRICKIER NOW THAT WE ARE LOOKING AT FASTER-MOVING RHYTHMS"

Example 10

This exercise uses a lot of syncopation, meaning that you are required to play several upstrokes in a row. Remember that you will still be playing silent downstrokes in between in order to maintain the correct picking sequence.

This instalment of my column has once again introduced some seemingly challenging concepts into the mix. However, it's vital that you recognise that throughout all of these lines, we are maintaining the normal down-up-down-up semiquaver picking sequence. The key is that often we will be going through the motions of the pick stroke, but without actually striking the note. Remember that you will need to do this in order to maintain the correct picking rhythm, which in turn will ensure that you always land on a downbeat with a downstroke.

I'll see you next month for more plectrum-related madness. In the next instalment we will begin looking at the next picking challenge – triplets!



Guy Pratt to perform at the 2018 show!

A hugely prolific session bassist over the last three decades, Guy has recorded and toured with artists of the calibre of Pink Floyd, Madonna, Roxy Music, Michael Jackson, Iggy Pop, Tom Jones and many more

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PHIL MANN

Advanced Tutorial

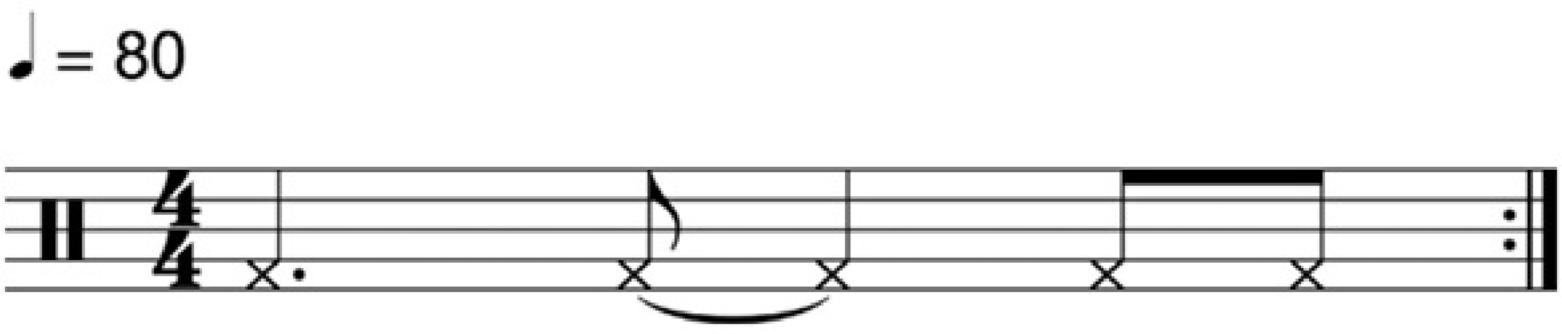
Phil's top set bass students get treated to another tricky dance number. This month: the cha-cha-cha

It's incredible that after a mere 60 minutes of watching the ballroom delights of *Strictly Come Dancing*, I'm already preparing to buy a top hat and tails in an effort to foxtrot my way to a new career, while simultaneously planning a deviously cunning strategy to win over Darcey Bussell. Damn the BBC for its delightful Saturday night enchantments, and infectiously toe-tapping array of light entertainment! Now, I'm hoping that the very mention of a cha-cha-cha will inspire the majority of you to start parading around your front rooms – and delivering bass parts along more suitably exotic lines.

The cha-cha-cha was first introduced in the earlier 1950s by Cuban composer Enrique Jorrin. History tells us that Jorrin, seeing that dancers were struggling with the syncopated rhythms of a Danzón-Mambo rhythm, began writing compositions that were deliberately composed to enhance the downbeat and deliver far less syncopation in the melody.

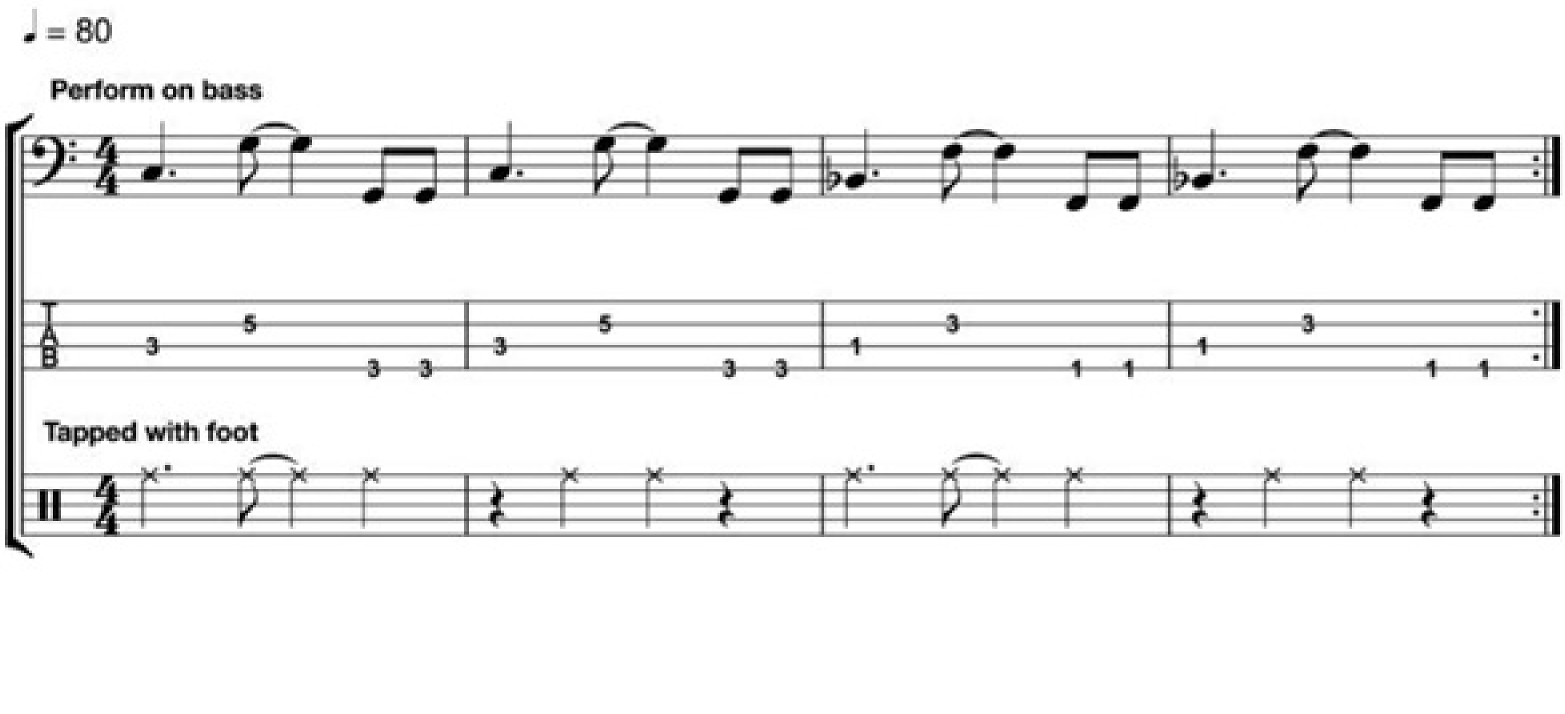
Example 1

Havana's Orquesta América was the first ensemble to perform the new compositions, with observers noting that dancers were improvising a new 'triple step' pattern in their footwork. The resulting onomatopoeia was titled the cha-cha-cha – and thus this month's first endeavour will be to investigate this Cuban rhythm in its most basic form. Using a metronome to assist your progress, clap out the rhythm that appears in **Example 1**.



Example 2

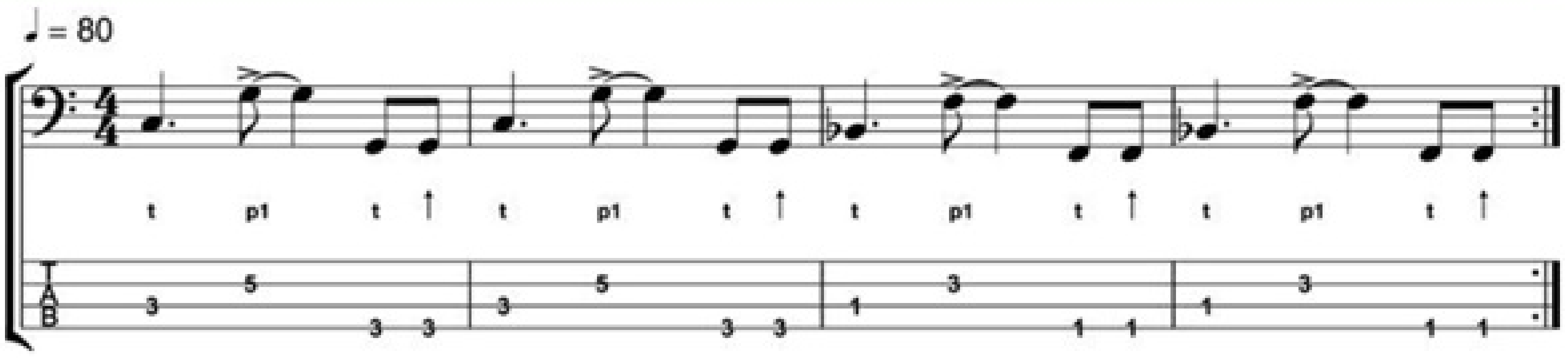
This has one simple task: play the given example of a cha-cha-cha bass-line while simultaneously tapping a Son (3:2) clave with your foot. Initially, this may seem like quite a straightforward exercise to complete – but in practice it isn't! Some students become greatly inspired by the challenges of completing independence exercises, while others find their enthusiasm completely extinguished by the complexities; hopefully you won't be among the latter!



"THIS MAY SEEM LIKE QUITE A STRAIGHTFORWARD EXERCISE TO COMPLETE – BUT IN PRACTICE IT ISN'T!"

Example 3

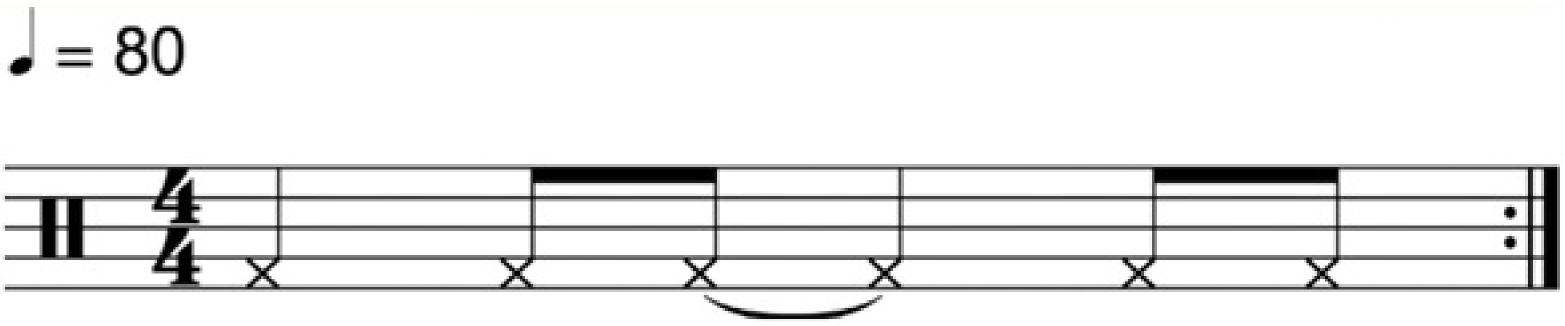
With a functional cha-cha-cha pattern now firmly established under your fingertips, it's time to introduce some elements of extended technique. One significant feature that helps identify a cha-cha-cha from other Cuban rhythms is the presence of a pair of eighth notes on the final beat of each bar. To help emphasise this unique characteristic, double thumbing has been used in **Example 3**.



A clean execution of this technique is essential to maintain a relaxed groove, so ensure that you're allowing your thumb to pass through the string and come to rest on the end of your fingerboard. This methodology will allow you perfect positioning to then execute the upstroke and complete the measure.

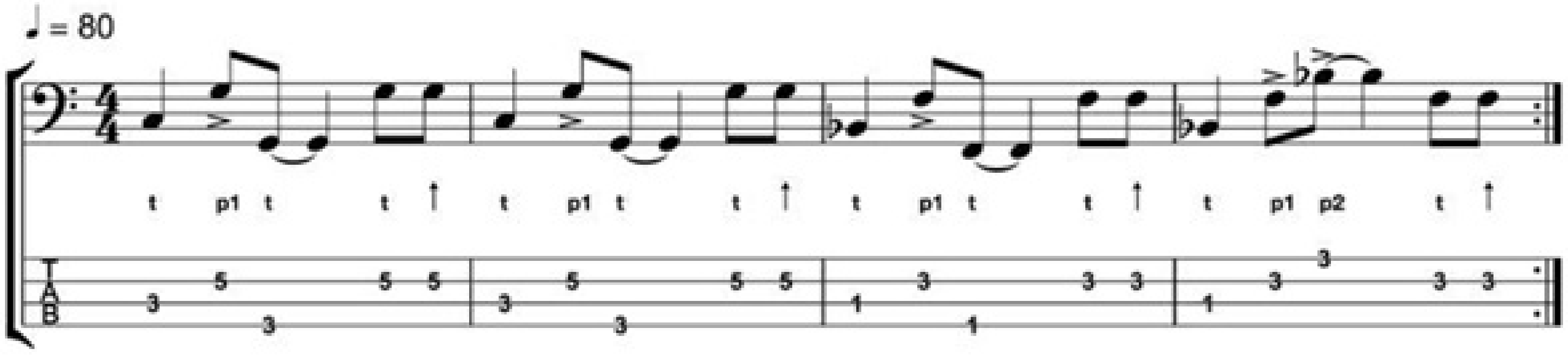
Example 4

To the trained eye, the majority of Afro-Cuban subgenres can be identified purely by the rhythmic information portrayed. However, it's still worth a mention that almost all categories of Latin music originated from dances, and thus there will always be variations of the initial grooves. **Example 4** introduces one such permutation, accepted as a stock alternative.



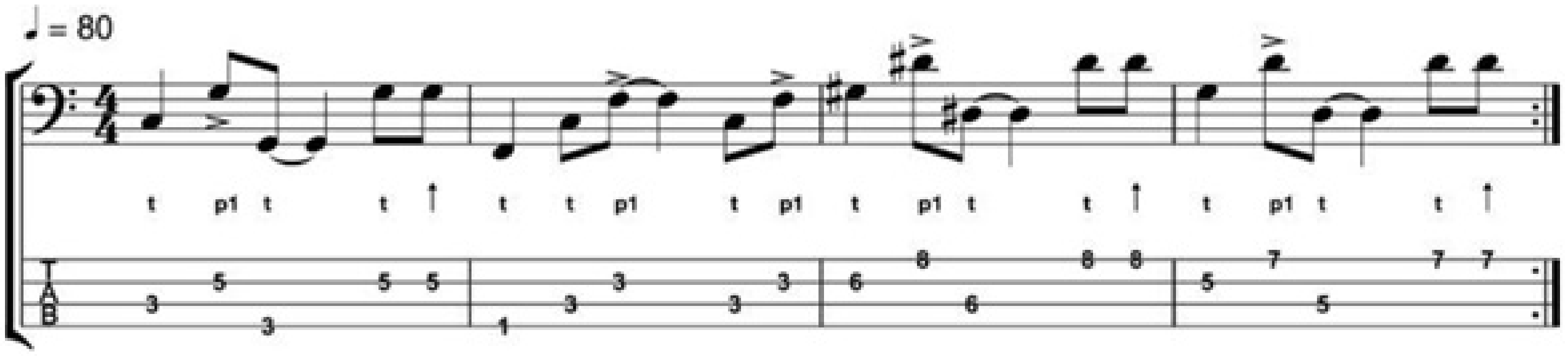
Example 5

As **Example 5** will confirm, the addition of a subsequent eighth note in the measure lends itself perfectly to the slap bass idiom, and can also double as a welcome aid to assist counting. Be aware that in the subsequent four bars there are examples of both single and double plucked notes; these marry themselves effortlessly to the aforementioned double thumbing.



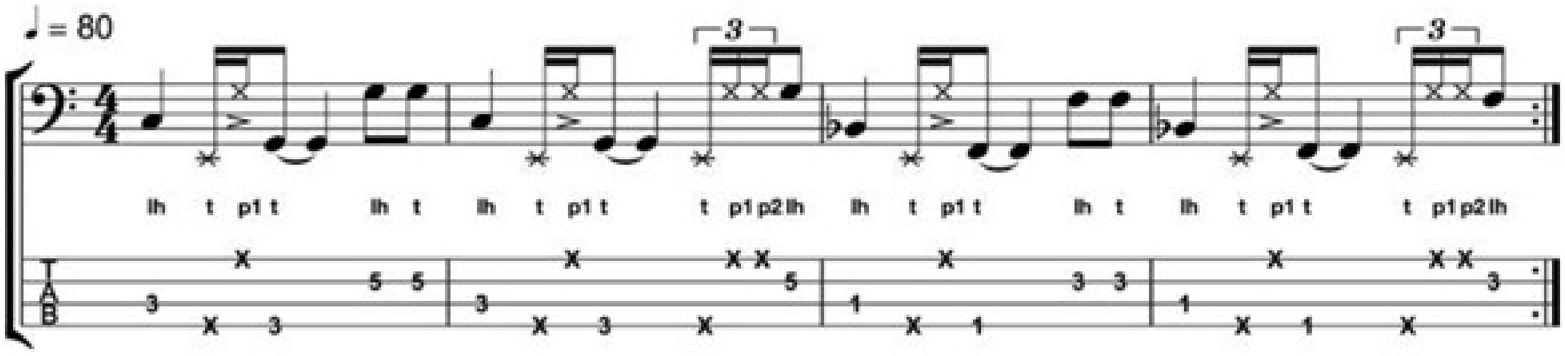
Example 6

In rhythmic terms, you'll notice that **Examples 5** and **6** are completely identical. As so much stylistic identity is traditionally obtained via the rhythmic framework, playing a consistent rhythm throughout any Afro-Cuban style is critical to performing the lines authentically, regardless of the melodic contribution.



Example 7

Referencing the rhythmic content of **Example 5, Example 7** now begins to shoehorn in a number of additional subdivisions. Although the addition of both sixteenth notes and sixteenth-note triplets is a sizeable one, it's actually the inclusion of fretting-hand slap notes that will be the primary melodic development of this exercise.



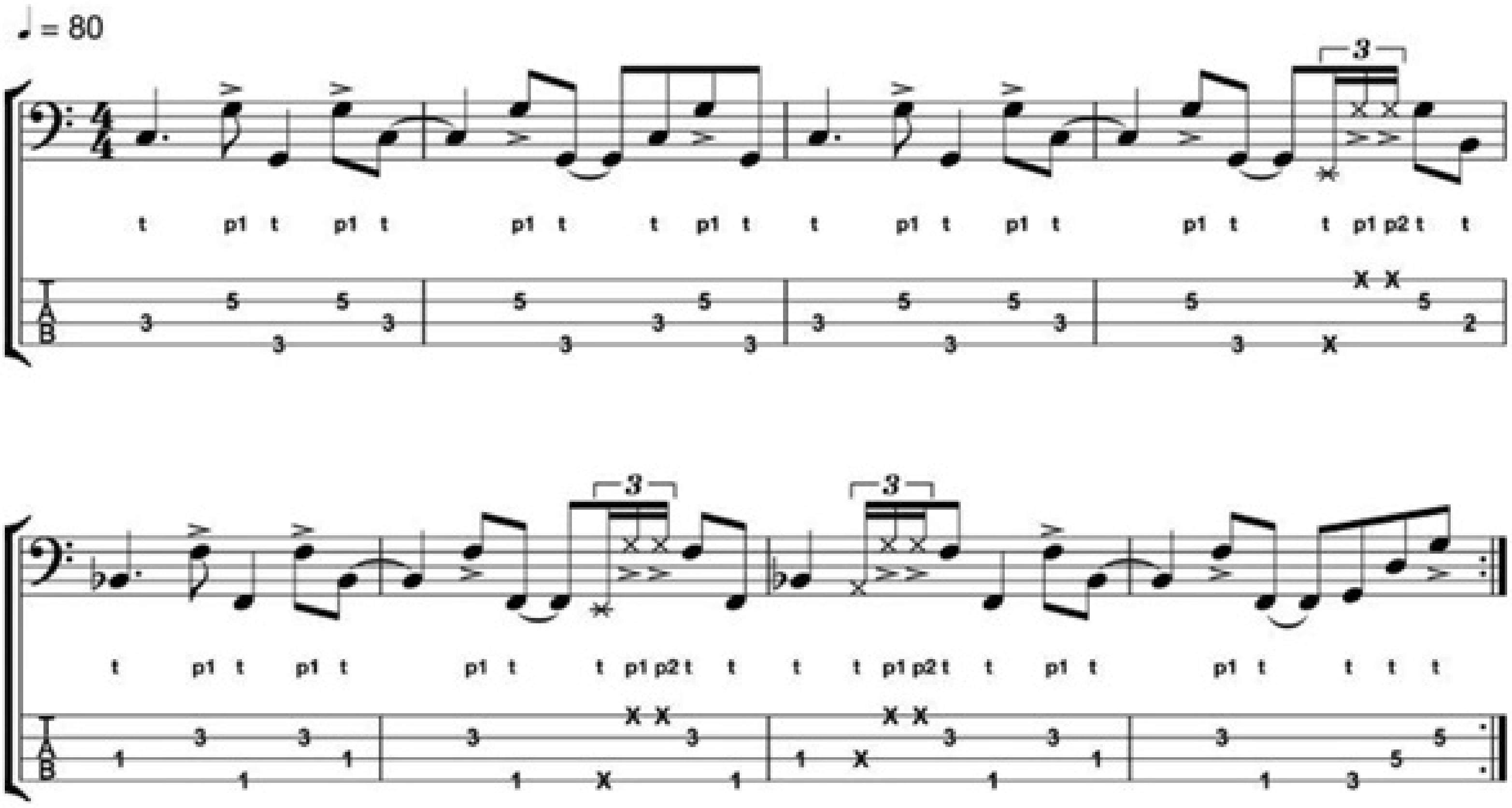
Example 8

As you'll recall from the previous Afro-Cuban studies in these advanced techniques pages, the traditional 'Tumbao' bass-line can be delivered in one of two forms. The first is as a single bar, where the rhythmical information mirrors that of the initial bar of a 3:2 Son clave. The second version is as a two-bar syncopated Tumbao, where the last quarter note of bar one is tied to the first quarter note of bar two. Clearly referring to these forms, the cha-cha-cha can also be delivered as either a one- or two-bar syncopated version. In examples of the latter, it's the final eighth note of the first bar that's tied to the first quarter note of the second.

"ONCE MASTERED, I'M SURE YOU'LL GET A '10' DISPLAYED ON CRAIG REVEL HORWOOD'S SCORE CARD"

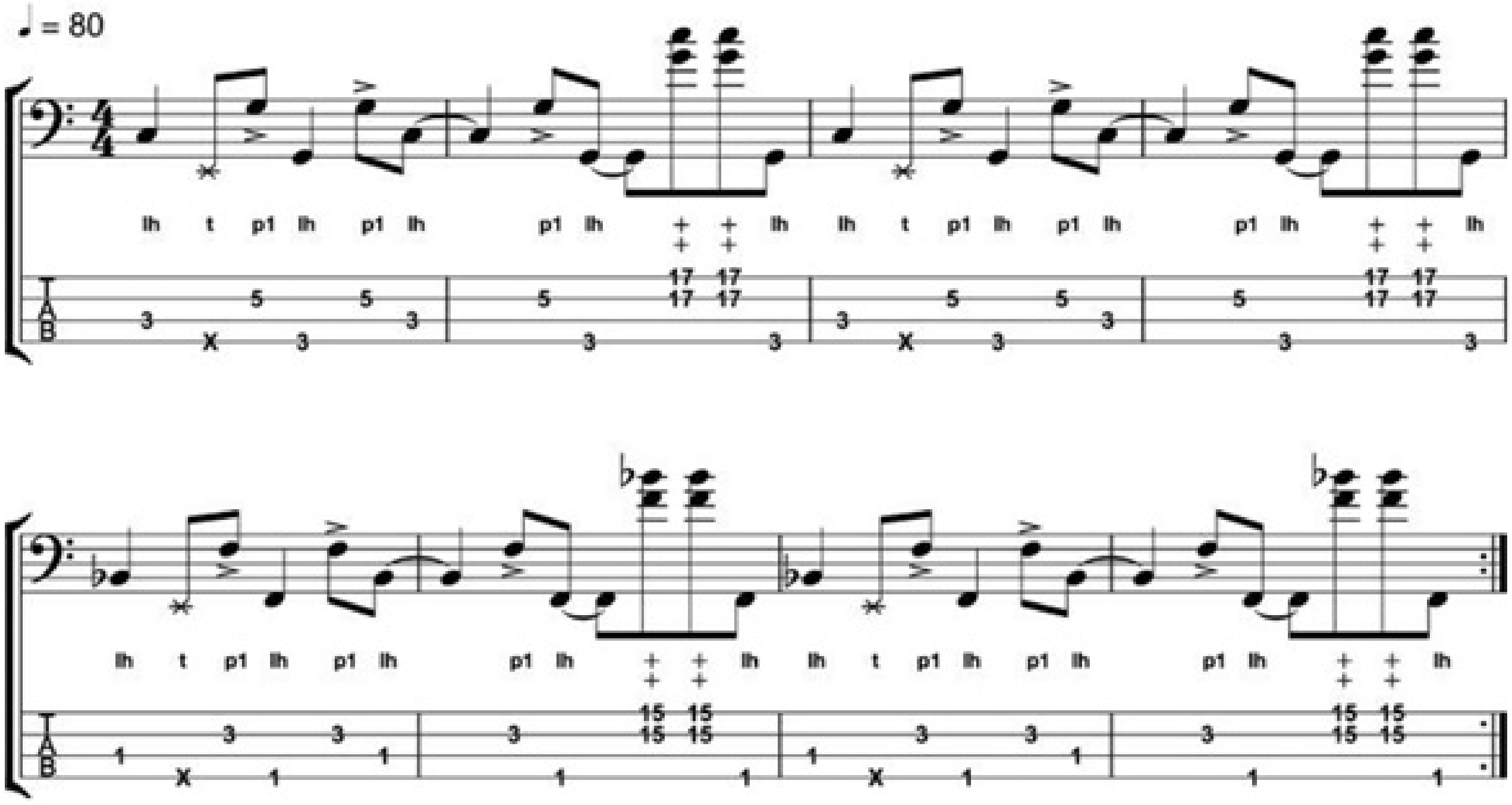
Example 9

Example 9 takes our initial two-bar pattern and applies it in a melodic context. Still jockeying between C and Bb key centres, the only marginally difficult hurdle to overcome in the subsequent exercise is that of a sixteenth note triplet, performed by the thumb, index and middle fingers working in conjunction.



Example 10

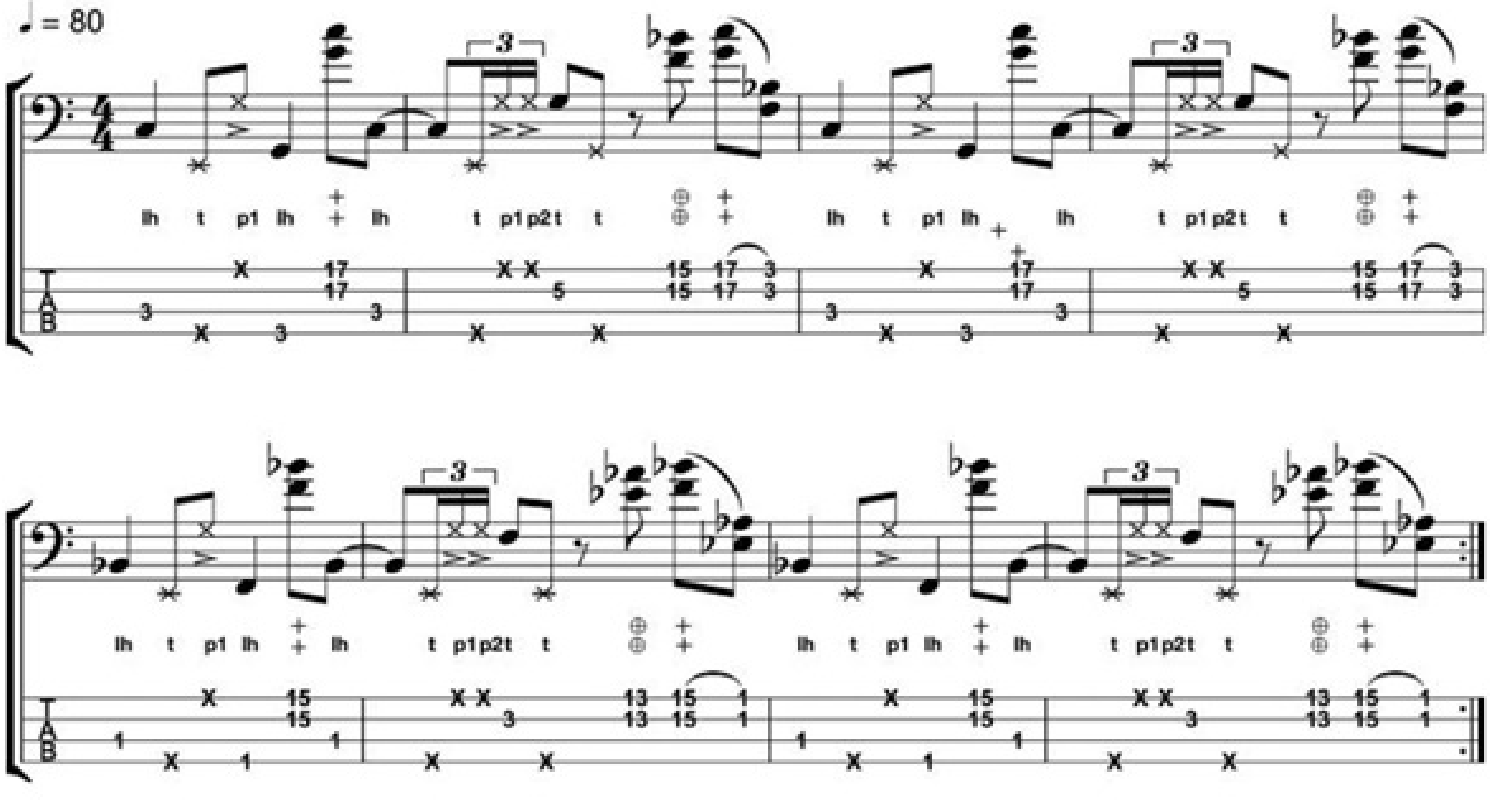
Our penultimate exercise uses the fretting hand to produce an array of pitched notes in conjunction with the traditionally plucked ones. This technique of slapping down pitches with the fretting hand will not be unknown to those of you who have studied slap bass; in fact we've covered the very technique in this column. **Example 10** attempts to develop the technical command of this technique, so that the plucking hard can become efficient at tapping the accompanying harmonic information.



Phil Mann at the London Bass Guitar Show

Example 11

Example 11 continues to reference the conventional cha-cha-cha rhythm, but these simplicities are somewhat overshadowed due to the inclusion of both left and right handed tapping. The exercise may take a while to perfect, but once mastered, I'm sure you'll get a '10' displayed on Craig Revel Horwood's score card! Practise hard, I'll see you next month.



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It's Miller time, says Mike Brooks

It's hard to believe that Marcus Miller's *The Sun Don't Lie* celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, especially when listening to it with a fresh pair of ears. This album marked the transition from Miller as R&B soul-man and session ace through to Miles Davis' talisman bassist in the mid-80s and finally into a multi-instrumentalist, producer, arranger, composer and solo artist in his own right. The album also marked the start of a series of albums, continuing today, which entwine and pull together the many and varied aspects of Miller's musical tastes and influences – each album featuring an array of the great and the good from all musical genres. Alongside the likes of Wayne Shorter, Omar Hakim, Vernon Reid, Lenny White and Joe Sanborn, Miller created an album that opened the door to the next stage of his career.

Combining elements of R&B, soul, jazz, funk and a touch of rock in places, Miller brought to the table an album of many colours, all served up from an array of basses. His trusty '77 Fender Jazz, which replaced his previous, stolen bass, covers most of the ground, but his Sadowsky and Fodera basses can also be heard, as can a Modulus fretless with its almost glass-like fretless tone. Around this time, Miller was heavily into SWR amplification, although he is also known as a player who likes to go direct to the desk. His basses were strung with DR Fat Beams steel strings (.045, .065, .080, .105), particularly on the fretted instruments, for a thick, crisp slap tone and a rounded fingerstyle tone with plenty of bite.

From the opening, melodic fingerstyle passage of 'Panther', you know you're in for something special – and the opening track doesn't disappoint, featuring a mix of fingerstyle melodies and slap grooves alongside some fine solos from Dean Brown and Marcus. The bass solos incorporate several of Marcus's signature phrases and playing techniques, including a root-octave slide at 5'20". 'Steveland' is a tip of the hat to Stevie Wonder and illustrates Miller's use of the bass almost as a vocal instrument. In fact, he has often remarked that music is a language, and that bassists should build a vocabulary to communicate fluently via an instrument.

'Rampage' is a standard Miller funkathon and features plucked chords, strums and tight fingerstyle melodies in rapid succession. It also features some tasteful trumpet passages from the late Miles Davis. The title track is a mixture of fretless and fretted slap passages, the fretless tone bubbling along with a warm tonal character before switching over from 2'13", underpinning the lively piano and steel drum accompaniment. 'Scoop' has become one of Miller's signature slap pieces, with its instantly recognisable melody and the interweaving between the bass clarinet, alto saxophone and bass. Bent plucked notes give the bass solo fluidity and movement.

The first of two tributes to Jaco is the tapped version of 'Mr Pastorius', a sombre piece that contrasts favourably with Miller's slapped cover of Jaco's trademark number, 'Teen Town'. Cleverly, Miller took a classic track, paid his respects and created a signature version of his own: at 3'23", he takes the track off on a tangent with a funky fingerstyle groove on a five-string bass. 'Moons' is another fretless tour de force, where Marcus capably proves that those who think he's just a slap monster are very much mistaken.

'Juju' is an R&B/funk-pop workout that shows the more commercial side of Marcus's playing, with the solo featuring some great envelope filter-effected tones. 'The King Is Gone' is a tribute to Davis, who at the time of the album's release, had passed away some 18 months earlier. The track is the most be-bop-fuelled track on the album and features Wayne Shorter on tenor and soprano saxophone. The great man's death was clearly sorely felt.

This album stamped Marcus's indelible footprint on the world of modern jazz. Listen and enjoy!

"FROM THE OPENING, MELODIC FINGERSTYLE PASSAGE OF 'PANTHER', YOU KNOW YOU'RE IN FOR SOMETHING SPECIAL"

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